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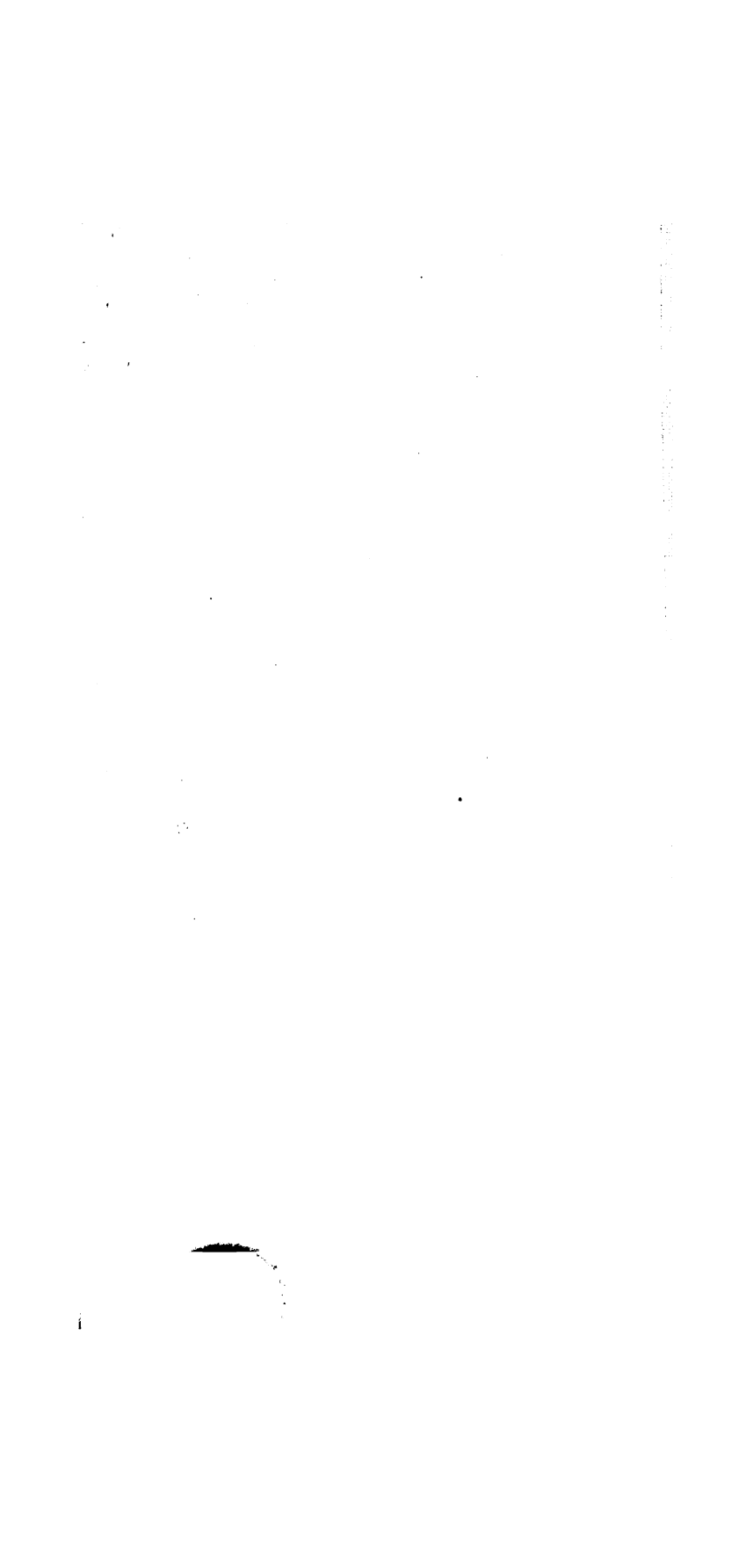
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## **THE FASCINATION OF THE KING**



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# THE FASCINATION OF THE KING.

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BY  
GUY BOOTHBY,  
AUTHOR OF

"DOCTOR NIKOLA," "BILLY BINKS—HERO," ETC.

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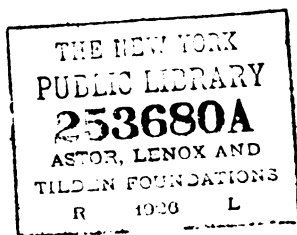
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CHICAGO AND NEW YORK:

RAND, McNALLY & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS.

MDCCCXCVI.

7. 1896



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# THE FASCINATION OF THE KING.

By GUY BOOTHBY,

*Author of "Doctor Nikola," "Billy Binks—Hero," etc.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### A LETTER FROM THE MARQUIS OF INSTOW.

My Dear Forsyth—Before entering upon a description of my own doings, since we said 'good-bye' upon the platform of the Oxford railway station, so long ago, I must thank you for your letter, dated the 1st of July, which came to hand but yesterday. Ever since my receipt of it, I have been puzzling my brain to understand by what manner of means I could best make you acquainted with the curious drama in which my sister Olivia and I have been playing a part since I stayed the night with you at Chessborough, exactly three years ago this week. I feel that it is only right you should know everything, but how to tell you is quite another matter. There is so much to be told, and if it is not narrated in detail, the effect will be lost. This voluminous epistle is the result, and I doubt very much if a more

curious experience has ever fallen to the lot of mortal man. Indeed, I must confess to a feeling of apprehension as to whether you may not be tempted to believe that much travelling has driven me mad, and that what I have written is the creation of a deranged imagination, rather than actual fact.

To hark back to the very beginning of things, I must revert to the talk we had together on the evening just referred to. You will remember that during the previous season Olivia had been regarded, and very justly too, I think, as the most beautiful woman in London; and when I remind you of that fact, I haven't the slightest doubt but that it will recall to you the substance of our conversation as we smoked together after dinner. It was patent to all our world that Belgravia wanted to marry my sister; and you know how disappointed I was because she absolutely and irrevocably refused to entertain the notion for a moment. I have always liked Belgravia; we were at Eton and Oxford together; our properties in two counties adjoin one another; and, what is perhaps more to the point, he is a good soldier, a sterling friend, and as perfect a gentleman as any that walks the streets of London. Poor fellow, I fear her refusal was a blow to him; but women, God bless them, are queer creatures at the best of times, and when they once make up

their minds not to do a thing, it is my experience that wild horses will not drag them to it. To protest under such circumstances is worse than useless, while to argue is but to admit a limited knowledge of the sex. For the reason, however, that my sister is my only living relative, now that my father and mother are dead, I would not coerce her into marrying a man she did not love, any more than I would attempt to make her pawn the family diamonds to meet the expenses of her presentation dress. So like a prudent man I accepted the inevitable, assured Belgravia of my warmest sympathy, and took Olivia off to Monte Carlo, thence to Venice, intending finally to have my yacht meet me there, and then to take a run out to Japan and back. It is from the time of our arrival in Venice that I date my story proper.

You know, my dear Forsyth, what an epicure I am in the matter of travel. I must have good weather, or I am nowhere. For that reason, I must be in Paris when the leaves are unfolding themselves on the trees in the Luxembourg Gardens; in St. Petersburg, between the middle of November and the 15th of December, when the ice is thick upon the Neva; and in Venice, a fortnight before Shrove Tuesday and the Carnival. On this occasion, we caught the latter place to a nicety, and engaged



rooms at Galaghetti's. What recollections the mention of that name conjures up! Cannot you see the proprietor with his queer little sallow face, and piercing black eyes, and hear again the atrocious success which greeted his attempts to pronounce your name? He inquired after you immediately we arrived, and begged that I would recall him to your memory when next I saw you. How little did I imagine then that nearly four years would pass before I should shake you by the hand again. For it is three years now since I bade you good-bye, and I quite expect that another year will elapse before I shall return to England.

One thing is certain, to enjoy Venice properly, one must take one's time. The man who imagines that it is possible to come at the heart of the Queen of the Adriatic in a week, would drink Imperial Tokay to assuage his thirst. One must take it in sips, for to rush from place to place, as do so many of our countrymen, in an attempt to take in the Academy—the Frari—Giovanni and Paola—Del Santissimo Redentore, and, shall we say, Francesco della Vigna, in a few days, is to have but the poorest remembrance of what one has seen, and to confound Titian's 'Martyrdom of St. Lawrence' with the 'Baptism of Christ' by Cima de Conegliano.

Looking back on that visit to Venice, after the

lapse of three years, I am struck by one remarkable fact, and that is the quite disproportionate importance of the events which led up to the extraordinary story I am about to tell you. Taken in their chronological order, they consist of the meeting with an objectionable English member of Parliament, a chance conversation at a cafe table, and an unexpected invitation to spend the evening at the house of an old friend.

The English member must come first, for two reasons. As if the mere presence in this ancient city of such a blatant windbag were not enough, he must needs appropriate my favorite room in the hotel, and also occupy the table in the window overlooking the Grand Canal, from which, as you know, one can just obtain a peep of the Palazzo Rezzonico in the distance, and which is always my own special spot for meals. When I arrived, Galaghetti was good enough to overwhelm me with apologies; he knew my preference for that table, he said, but Mr. M'Sweeney (that was the beast's name) had occupied it for the last month, and, as he was at some pains to show me, it would scarcely be fair to turn him out, in order to make room for a new arrival, however old a customer. Naturally, I bade him think no more about the matter. But I must confess that when I was so magnanimous, I had not seen the man who had forestalled me.

At breakfast next morning (and I am still English enough to prefer breakfasting in my own hotel, at the hour surely intended by nature for the meal, to scampering out to cafes when the morning is far spent), I was reading my letters, and awaiting the appearance of Olivia, who, like most of her sex, has never learned to appreciate the difference between the stroke of the hour and five minutes past, when I heard a step behind me, and felt a hand placed upon my shoulder. I looked up in some surprise, half expecting to find myself face to face with an old friend whom I had not thought to meet in Venice. But such was not the case. This person I had never seen before. Standing before me, at least six feet high, broad-shouldered, red-faced, red-haired, and seeming to fill half the room, was an individual whose identity I was able to guess without a second thought.

‘Good-morning, my lord,’ he said, holding out a ponderous freckled hand for me to shake as he spoke. ‘I had no idea you were in Venice until five minutes ago. You remember me, I suppose, George M’Sweeney, Member for Middlesworth?’

Much as I should like to have denied the acquaintance, I had to acknowledge that I did remember him perfectly. He was a Liberal Unionist, whose only excuse for a Parliamentary career was a sense of

duty that was almost that of a Roman father, an overweening belief in his own importance, an imperviousness to ridicule, and a strange capacity for spoiling the chances of his party by inconsequent oratory whenever he was allowed so to do.

Having once broken the ice, he literally overwhelmed me. There appeared to be no subject under heaven upon which he was not, if I may so put it, over-informed. The great European questions of the day he dismissed in a string of clap-trap phrases; the prospects of the ensuing Parliamentary session he gauged with a keenness of perception that could scarce fail to be inaccurate. And yet, dominating it all, there was a certain sincerity of belief and singleness of purpose about the man that I must confess charmed, while it astonished me. By the time Olivia entered the room, we were comparing the merits of Titian and Pordenone, if you can imagine such a thing, and I was receiving such an exposition of the various limners of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as would have made the bronze horses of S. Mark bow their heads and weep for the consummate vanity of man. In justice to the fellow, I must admit that he had learned his lesson, such as it was, well; but I shall never enter the Scuola di S. Rocco again without feeling oppressed by the remembrance of his glib, self-complacent criticism. Whatever he

may have given to the world, Mr. Ruskin, through the medium of the guidebooks, has at least much to answer for in Venice.

M'Sweeney being still beside me when Olivia put in an appearance, nothing remained for me but to introduce him to her. I found a certain enjoyment in doing this, for Olivia's face, as you so well know, is expressive to the last degree. On this occasion, I could see by the way she looked at him that she regarded our countryman with very much the same combination of mild interest and horror that the country vicar's daughter bestows upon a dancing bear. M'Sweeney, on the other hand, behaved as gentlemen of his stamp invariably do. As an art critic, and when we were alone, he was an amusing anomaly enough; but immediately a third person, and that third person a woman, was imported into the company, he floundered in quicksands of politeness, and made himself an object pitiful to behold. Suffice it that in less than five minutes, two of which he spent in commenting on the weather, and shifting uneasily upon his feet, he had left us to return to his own table, and we were free to commence our meal. Olivia settled herself in her seat with an indescribable shake of her plumage, the meaning of which I know as well as any words. Once I had seen her do it, there was not the slightest necessity

for her to tell me that she hoped we should not see very much of Mr. M'Sweeney during our stay in Venice. Like Lord Burleigh's nod, her gestures are invariably significant.

Breakfast finished, I was sitting in the hall scanning Galignani's Messenger and wondering at the utter absence of news, when Olivia came flying down-stairs. I looked at her in surprise, for, as you are aware, my sister is not prone to excitement. Moreover, she was dressed for walking, and it was only ten o'clock.

'What on earth is the matter?' I asked. 'I did not expect you for at least an hour to come.'

'Get your hat this instant and come with me,' she answered excitedly. 'That friend of yours, M'Sweeney, is looking for you in order to propose an excursion. He stopped me in the corridor up-stairs just now, and informed me that the Admiral had given him permission to visit the arsenal with any friends who might care to accompany him. He inquired where he could find you, and in reply I was wicked enough to insinuate that you were in your bedroom.'

Without more ado, I found my hat, and quickly led the way out of the hotel. Then calling a gondola, I bade the man convey us with all possible speed to the church of S. Rocco. We were only just in time,

for as we took our places in the boat and the gondolier gave his first flirt of the oar, we saw M'Sweeney appear upon the hotel steps in search of us. Another minute, and we could not possibly have escaped him.

I have narrated this otherwise commonplace incident, not for any interest it contains in itself, but because it seems to me to be the pivot upon which turns all the rest of the curious story I have set myself to tell you. I argue that, had it not been for M'Sweeney's impending invitation, we should not, in all probability, have left the hotel so early, and but for my desire to escape him, I should not have decided upon the church of S. Rocco, which I have seen a dozen times over, but which was the first name that rose upon my tongue, as our destination. In that case we should not have accepted a certain invitation, nor should we have been drawn into the influence of as extraordinary an individual as, I venture to believe, the world has ever seen. Olivia would not be the happy woman she is to-day, and I should not have won—— But there—I must not anticipate. You will find out all that when you have read my story.

In spite of what I have said above, I am inclined to believe that of all the places of worship in beautiful Venice, the church of S. Rocco, next to that of S. Mark. and perhaps Santa Maria della Salute might

be included in the category, is the most interesting. Though almost insignificant in its outward appearance, it contains a wealth of art treasures which, with the two exceptions just mentioned, ranks it second to no other church in the city. The Titian in the little chapel to the right of the high-altar, alone is worth a visit.

On reaching the building in question, we bade our gondolier wait for us, and entered it. As far as we could see, with the exception of the sacristan, who was eating his breakfast in a corner, we were its only occupants. Despite the brilliant sunshine outside, the place was very sombre, though here and there long shafts of light penetrated the quaint windows, and fell in zigzag patterns upon the stone floor. There was, however, something so restful about the silence, that an attempt to break it by hurrying would have seemed little better than a sacrilege. For this reason, we examined our Tintoretto quietly, lingered over the miracle at Bethesda, slowly considered the Annunciation in all its lights, and gave even a closer attention than usual to the two incidents depicted in the life of San Rocco. Then leaving the high-altar, we passed into the little chapel on the right. Here even a greater quiet reigned, but there was this difference—one glance round showed us that we were no longer alone.



On the steps leading to the small altar at the further end, a man was kneeling in prayer, while at a short distance another stood watching and patiently waiting for him to rise. For some reason, whether it was a premonition of what was to come, or the result of the extraordinary fascination we afterwards discovered this singular being to possess, I cannot say—I only know that my eyes having once alighted upon him, could scarcely withdraw themselves again. And yet his back was all that I could see.

Presently, while we were examining Titian's marvellous 'Betrayal,' the man I have just referred to rose from his knees and turned towards his companion. As he did so, we were permitted a good view of his face. Though it is upwards of three years now since that moment, I can recall the whole scene as vividly as if it were but yesterday. I can see the half-dark chapel—the glittering altar, Olivia by my side, and this strange individual, who was destined to exercise such a potent influence upon our future lives, standing before us.

Clearly, however, as I can recollect the man's face as I saw it then, I find that when I sit down with my pen in my hand and endeavor to give you a description of it, I am quite nonplussed. A bare outline, setting forth the color of his skin, eyes, and

hair, the contour of his face, and the absence of either beard or moustache, would no more enable you to realise him, than to tell a man who had never been in Venice that the Ponte dei Sospiri spans the Grand Canal would help him to picture for himself the Bridge of Sighs. On the other hand, if you can imagine a man about six feet two in height, very slimly built, with a pure Venetian face (I say Venetian, as opposed to Italian, for, to my mind, there is a distinction with a decided difference), large and lustrous eyes, a lofty forehead leading up to a mass of wavy black hair, small hands and feet, and a grace of movement that would almost warrant one in using that abominable adjective, fawn-like, you will have derived some faint notion of the man whom I shall consider the hero of my life, and about whom this story is most concerned.

The stranger, whose mere personal appearance had thus exercised such an unwonted fascination over me, said something in an undertone to his companion, who bowed respectfully, and accompanied him from the chapel. As a rule, I fancy my worst enemy could scarcely accuse me of inquisitiveness, but on this occasion I will confess to a strong feeling of curiosity as to who this mysterious individual might be. That the person with him was an inferior it was easy to understand, but even he bore himself with the carriage of a gentleman.

As we left the church in our turn and passed into the bright sunshine, where our gondola awaited us, I turned to Olivia and inquired if she had been at all impressed by the man we had seen.

‘I noticed him, of course,’ she replied; ‘but I can confess I saw nothing extraordinary about him. It is my experience that Venice teems with such men.’

‘I fancy, however, that this particular individual must be a little out of the common,’ I replied. ‘Do you notice the respect with which his companion dressed him?’

‘My dear Instow,’ said Olivia, with that quiet superior manner of hers that seldom fails to achieve success, ‘you must admit you are endowing this man with all sorts of attributes he is scarcely likely to possess. If you could but know the truth about him you would, in all probability, discover that he is either a member of one of the numerous impoverished noble houses that abound in this city, or a non-adventurer; very probably both.’

‘You admit, then, that you set him down to your own mind as a Venetian,’ I said, with a chuckle of satisfaction, for I have a respect for Olivia’s judgment, and like to find it in accord with my own.

‘There could be no possible doubt upon that score,’ she answered confidently, and with that we resumed our places in our gondola again.

In response to the man's inquiry whither he should take us, I directed him to the Piazza S. Marco. When we reached it, and I had paid him his fare, I led the way to a cafe where, at a small table, we seated ourselves. To my mind, there are few things in the world more pleasant on a bright morning than to sit outside a cafe on this magnificent Piazza, to sip one's wine or chocolate, smoke one's cigar or cigarette, watch the pigeons of S. Mark's, and talk with one's friends.

On this particular occasion, we had been seated at our table for something like a quarter of an hour before we recognised any one we knew. Then Olivia suddenly leant across the table, and, touching my arm, drew my attention to an exquisitely dressed, dapper little man, with a gray vandyke beard and small moustache, the latter much waxed and curled, who was leaning on his cane, watching through his eyeglass the gambols of two French poodles on the stones before him.

'Surely that is Monsieur de Trailles?' said Olivia; 'I cannot believe that there are two men in the world so much alike.'

Before I had time to reply, the man we were discussing turned, and we were thus enabled to see his full face. As you will have guessed, it was De Trailles, looking exactly the same in color and

features as we both remember him the better part of twenty years ago. He recognised us instantly, and assuming his most grandiose manner, which I used to say was without its parallel in Europe, came, hat in hand, to greet us. A minute later he was seated with us, and we were in the full flood-tide of speech. You know his way; we began with old friends and mere acquaintances, married half, and divorced the rest. It was then that I heard, for the first time, of poor De Sarniac's suicide in Florence, and Berthier's marriage in Turin. I was also given three reasons why Flancourt's widow has not tempted Providence a second time, and was reliably informed as to the events which induced Vocsqal to resign his chamberlainship in Vienna, and to emigrate to Monaco, which is supposed to suit his gout better than the Austrian capital. In fact, to put it in a nut-shell, in something less than a quarter of an hour, I was conversant with more than half the scandal of Europe. Personally, I will own to being more than a little afraid of Gustave de Trailles; his tongue is as keen as his invention, and when I am with him, I cannot help entertaining a fear lest it may be my lot to furnish him with food for gossip later on. Olivia, however, thoroughly enjoyed herself. The Countess Flancourt has long been one of her cherished correspondents, and, as you know,

she was staying with the Vocsqals when the Prince's health first showed signs of giving way last autumn. Knowing all this, it amused me to see her watching De Trailles through the lace of her parasol as he talked, a little smile hovering round the corners of her mouth meanwhile, and to wonder what she thought of his invention.

If I desired to know the secret of any man in Europe, I should certainly ask De Trailles; and, as I heard him praising or damning half the aristocracy of Venice, I found myself regretting that he had not been with us in the church of S. Rocco an hour before, in order that he might have made us acquainted with the name and history of the man in whom we, or rather I, had been so much interested. Thinking he might possibly be able to help me, I endeavored to describe the person to him, but I was immediately confronted by the same difficulty as I found in presenting him to you. To speak of a sallow-skinned man with dark hair and eyes—slightly above the middle height, in a place where the majority of inhabitants boasted just such qualifications, was of no possible assistance to a recognition.

'Whoever he is, he seems to have made an impression upon you, *mon cher ami*,' said De Trailles, when I had finished; 'and, in that case, Venice may

claim, as you English say, "to have scored one." For I cannot remember your betraying such interest in a man before.'

'Instow has assuredly got this person upon his brain,' said Olivia, with a slight dash of scorn in her voice. 'For my own part, I must tell you candidly I was not so much impressed. The man looked like an adventurer, and probably is one. Are you still bent, my dear brother, on making his acquaintance?'

'I want to know who he is first, of course,' I said. 'But if he should prove, in any way, a respectable member of society, I shall be only too glad to do so.'

'Bravo, British caution,' said Olivia, 'faithful to the last. If all else perish, let us retain our respectability.'

'For all we know to the contrary, this fellow may be a member of the Camorra,' continued De Trailles, with an airy wave of his hand, 'or a mad-headed anarchist bent on blowing up the Ponte dei Sospiri.'

I was about to reply in a similar strain, when I chanced to turn my head in the direction of the Campanile. To my astonishment, the man of whom we were speaking and his previous companion were coming in our direction.

'A truce to jesting,' I said, as nervously as a school-miss who sees, when under her duenna's eye,

lover approaching; 'here is the very man him-

his is delightful,' exclaimed De Trailles, 'Now  
ne see if I know him.'

loser and closer the two men came. I saw De  
lles put up his glass and look at the man. Hav-  
done so, he dropped it again almost as quickly.  
the same instant, he jumped to his feet, raised  
hat and bowed politely, the mysterious stranger  
rning the salute with the easy grace of one ac-  
omed to such deference.

s soon as they had passed, and were out of hear-  
I turned upon my companion.

low that you know the man,' I said, 'possibly  
can tell us who he is. I am glad to observe that  
seems to have made quite an impression upon

I had guessed that he was the person you were  
tiring about,' replied De Trailles, 'I should have  
n the last man in the world to have laughed at  
infatuation. I must beg your pardon. Now  
n perfectly understand it.'

his is really excellent comedy,' said Olivia, clap-  
; her hands. 'Who is he? Tell us that. Is he  
ince incognito, a famous singer, a sorcerer, or  
an ordinary commonplace tourist like our-  
s?'



De Trailles settled himself down in his chair, and polished his eyeglass with his dainty silk handkerchief before he answered.

'You place me, for the moment, in an awkward predicament,' he said, with the air of a man who has his chance, and is determined to make the most of it. 'Who the man really is, in whom you seem to have taken so much interest, that is to say, who he is by birth, I can no more tell you, than I can vouch for the name of the designer of the Bronze Horse yonder. I have heard it said that his father was a Frenchman of good family, while his mother was a member of one of the oldest houses of Venice, but of the truth of it I can say nothing. Suffice it, that he is now His Majesty Marie L, King of the Medangs.'

'Medangs?' I cried. 'My dear fellow, I have travelled about the world a good deal, but I must confess to never having heard that there was such a place before; pray where is it?'

'That again I cannot tell you,' our friend replied imperturbably. 'It must be somewhere, however, for the reason that he is recognised by France and England, also I believe by Russia; but beyond the fact that it is in Asia, and I believe somewhere between India and China, I have not the remotest notion of its locality.'

‘And you say this man is king of the country. As he is not a native, pray how did he bring that about?’

‘I believe he chanced to hear of its advantages, discovered that it was villainously governed, went in with but one companion—not the man you saw with him to-day, but another who is still abroad, I fancy—braved all risks and dangers, and when the monarch then seated upon the throne saw fit to pay the debt of nature, mounted it himself and by sheer impudence and force of will proclaimed himself king and remained so. That was five years ago. The marvellous part of the story, to my mind, is that he still lives to hold it.’

‘Surely, you must be jesting?’ said Olivia. ‘The story seems too strange to be probable.’

I noticed that her eyes turned, as she spoke, in the direction taken by the man of whom we were talking.

‘As far as I can gather, it is perfectly true,’ replied De Trailles.

‘But do you mean to tell me,’ I cried, for I found as much difficulty in believing the story as Olivia did, ‘that this man went into a savage country with but one companion, and whether the inhabitants liked it or not, elected himself king?’

‘Exactly! That is what I do mean,’ replied De

Trailles. 'He proclaimed himself Marie I., King of the Medangs, and remains so to this present moment. I can quite understand your astonishment. The story seems hardly credible, does it? And yet if you knew the man, you would not find it so difficult to believe. Remember the fascination he has exercised over you; and bear in mind that you have never spoken to him.'

'I am willing to admit both facts. But tell me this, if he is king of this country, as you say, how does it come about that he is here in Venice?'

I thought I had set a nice little trap for my friend, but he was prepared with an answer.

'On that hangs one of the most curious, if not the most curious part of the story. At times, I believe, the little kingdom has been sadly put to it for ready money. Incredible as it may seem, this has been supplied by an old woman of Venice.'

'An old woman of Venice! What sort of woman?'

'Ah! That I cannot tell you. I only know what is known to the world. Do you remember the Palazzo Zuccherini?'

'Perfectly well. Is it likely I shall ever forget it?'

'In that case you will recollect the magnificent dwelling next door.'

'Early Renaissance, with frescoes by Giorgione? Yes, we passed it only this morning.'

‘Very well, then. Five years ago it was put up for sale. For many months it remained empty, without an offer being made for it. Magnificent property as it was, one of the finest palaces, it is said, in all Venice, no one would take it. One day, however, it became known that it had been purchased for an enormous sum by an old Hungarian peasant. Who she was, or how she had made her money, nobody knew. At any rate, the house was renovated from top to bottom, and is now, so I am told, for I have not been inside it for nearly twenty years, about the most perfect residence in Venice.’

‘And does the present owner not make any use of it?’ I asked, seeking for the mystery.

‘If living in a garret at the very top of the building and never seeing any one at all can be called making use of it, she does. Otherwise the house stands empty. But once every two years His Majesty of the Medangs visits Europe, when the entire dwelling is placed at his disposal free of charge; the rooms are magnificently furnished, the cuisine becomes second to none, while troops of servants take the place of the one old domestic who at other times attends to the simple wants of the owner.’

‘And do you think that His Majesty of the Medangs obtains his money from this miserly old person up-stairs?’

‘Ah! That I cannot say. But you will do me the justice to admit that it looks like it—does it not?’

‘And pray what sort of person is His Majesty?’ asked Olivia. ‘I presume you have spoken to him?’

‘On many occasions,’ replied De Trailles, who, as you know, makes a point of knowing everybody. ‘I can only describe him as fascinating to a boundless degree.’

‘Come, come, my dear fellow,’ I said, ‘we are really growing a little too enthusiastic. You mean that, by virtue of his curious history, he has the gift of exciting and retaining one’s attention for rather longer periods than the ordinary run of men.’

‘I mean that while you are in his presence, you think of nothing but himself. To sum it all up, he may be described as your English phrase—which so often means nothing, but in this case means everything—has it, he is every inch a king.’

‘Really, my dear Monsieur de Trailles, you arouse our curiosity to a wonderful degree,’ said Olivia. ‘We must endeavor to make His Majesty’s acquaintance before we leave. A being who can take one out of one’s self in the manner you describe, is a god-send at the end of this prosaic nineteenth century.’

‘If you do get to know him, I pray of you beware,’ replied De Trailles, with mock solemnity. ‘The con-

sequences of such fascination as he possesses are incredible, and if one plays with fire, one must not grumble if one burns one's fingers. As your Shakespeare has it, "Men were deceivers ever."

'*Rex non potest fallere nec falli*,' I quoted.

'In this case, *Rex non potest peccare* would perhaps be more to the point,' said Olivia, with a smile, as she rose and began to button her gloves as a signal of dismissal. 'Come, Instow, we must be getting back to our hotel, if we want any lunch—Good-bye, Monsieur de Trailles, you have made the last hour pass very agreeably, and it is evident you have taken a leaf out of your king's book.'

'I assure you, you would find it difficult to pay me a greater compliment,' replied De Trailles, as he shook hands.

When we left him, we took a gondola at the steps, and made our way by the Rio di S. Luca to our hotel. As we passed through the hall, I glanced at the letter-rack. A square envelope with Olivia's name upon it confronted me. She opened it as she went up-stairs, and on the first landing stopped and turned to speak to me.

'Fate and His Majesty seem to pursue us,' she said, as she handed me the contents of the envelope.

I glanced at the card, and discovered that it was

an invitation from Lady Hammerton, who, with her husband, has taken up her permanent abode in Venice, to an 'At Home' the following evening. In bold handwriting, in the top left-hand corner, was this sentence: 'To meet His Majesty, the King of the Medangs.'

## CHAPTER II.

## LADY HAMMERTON'S 'AT HOME.'

When we were both younger, and more prone to speak disrespectfully of our elders, you will remember that we invariably referred to Lady Hamerton's residence at the Palazzo Contaglioni, as Nebuchadnezzar's Caravanserai, for the reason that at her receptions, held every Thursday evening from nine o'clock till midnight, one met 'all people, nations, and languages.' I believe at the time we found those formal gatherings slow enough in all conscience, but looking back on them now, at the end of twenty years, I am touched with a sort of, what might almost be called pathetic reminiscence, at any rate something that is half a pleasure, half a pain, difficult to describe, but not unlike that conjured up in the poetic mind by the odor of pot-pourri. Poor old Lady Hamerton, she is dead and gone now; and all the frailties and inconsistencies of her extraordinary life must lie in the tomb forgotten, with that painted, bedizened, addled old pate;



while, contrary to the general rule and strangely enough, considering her career, her unceasing charity and boundless good-nature are alone remembered by the world. So may it fare with all of us.

The hands of my watch pointed to a quarter past nine as our gondolier brought us to the steps of the palace. We disembarked, and, when I had assisted Olivia with her train, made our way up the steps into the hall. What a hall it was, hung with tapestry, and decorated with fifteenth century armor, the value of which was priceless! Here the servants, English every man Jack of them, and attired in the Hammerton livery which, handsome though it may be, always sets my teeth on edge, relieved us of our wraps, and then escorted us up-stairs to the drawing-room, where our hostess was receiving her guests.

As soon as our names were announced, she hastened forward to meet us, her poor cranky old head painted like a mask, and surmounted by a plume of feathers, like a Zulu warrior.

'My dear Lady Olivia,' she cried, taking my sister's hand in both of hers and shaking it heartily, 'how much too good of you to come.' Then turning to me, 'and you too, Lord Instow. I did not for a moment expect you. Hammerton heard that you only arrived in Venice yesterday morning.'

'We arrived on Tuesday,' said Olivia, unfurling her fan, and looking at her hostess over it. 'Had you not so kindly invited us to-night, we should have called to pay our respects to you to-morrow.'

'I protest you are kindness itself,' replied our hostess, mincing her words in her most artificial eighteenth-century manner.

As she spoke, her husband, Sir John, put in an appearance. I tell you, Forsyth, he looked for all the world as when we saw him last, not a day older (he must have been seventy-nine if a year), and not a day younger. His hair was as black and thick as my father remembered it at Eton; his eyes were as bright and keen as the day he shot Von Ollerswitz in Paris more than fifty years ago. He also is gone now. He caught cold, they tell me, at his wife's funeral six months after we left Venice, and followed her to their atrocious family vault a week later. But he was juvenile to the last. I heard that he pinched his waist, painted his face, and dyed his hair on the morning of the day that he expired.

His first action, after greeting us, was to pay Olivia one of his customary compliments, capping it with a Virgilian quotation that was certainly, if perhaps a little wanting in the niceties of taste, at least apropos of the occasion.

'I am rejoiced that you are able to give us the

honor of your company, my lord,' he said, turning to me, 'for I flatter myself that to-night I shall be able to act the part of a showman for once in my life to advantage. Our guest on this occasion, as you are aware, is His Majesty, the King of the Medangs, a personage whose character and career are alike worth studying.'

'I look forward with considerable pleasure to being presented to His Majesty,' I answered, with a smile at what I then considered, God knows how erroneously, the ludicrousness of the situation.

The man was certainly a king, that is, if all I had been told were true, but even then of what a state, and of what a country? A wild tract peopled by an uncivilised community, where might was right and the weakest went to the wall. I endeavored to pump Sir John concerning him, but just as he was about to satisfy my curiosity, a servant entered to inform him that the king had arrived. Sir John immediately begged me to excuse him, and went off to receive his guest, while Olivia and I remained by our hostess's side, at her request, to assist her in welcoming him.

Here I must record a curious experience. As you know I have, all my life, been more or less favored with opportunities of being in the royal presence, and for this reason I have, in a great degree, become

exempt from that peculiar sensation of nervousness which afflicts so many unfortunates prior to the entrance of a sovereign. To my astonishment, however, I discovered that on this occasion I was conscious of a decided quickening of the pulse as I stood beside my hostess and watched for the incoming of the King of the Medangs.

When he did enter the room, accompanied by his aide-de-camp (a Greek, whose name I afterwards learned was Conrad Manolaki, and whom I recognised as being the man I had seen waiting for him in the church of S. Rocco the previous morning), he did not look about him, but made his way instantly across to where his hostess was standing, just as if he had known, previous to seeing her, the exact spot where he would find her. Whether it was the adventurous story I had been told of his career, the remembrance of his extraordinary nerve and pluck, or the fascination of his mere presence, that moved me, I cannot say, but I know that it seemed to me as he stood before us then, that I had never in my life before seen so majestic—I use the word advisedly—a figure as he presented. He was attired in the perfection of evening dress, but with a neatness the like of which I had never before encountered. A parti-colored ribbon, denoting some order, that of Marie I., I discovered later, crossed his chest, and gave a

1

little variety to his sombre appearance; otherwise he was without ornament or decoration of any sort or description. Taken altogether, from the soles of his elegant patent leather shoes to the topmost hair of his well-brushed head, he bore the unmistakable impress of a gentleman, a little foreign, perhaps, but still a gentleman.

‘Your Majesty does us great honor,’ said Lady Hammerton in Italian, as she welcomed him.

‘I assure you it gives me the greatest pleasure to come,’ he answered in the same tongue. ‘You are one of those who have shown me great kindness, Lady Hammerton.’

I saw the old lady thrill with pleasure at this mark of his esteem, then turning to the king again, she said: ‘If your Majesty will permit me, I should like to introduce to you the daughter of one of my oldest friends, Lady Olivia Wokingham.’

Olivia curtsied, as no other woman in England, or Europe for that matter, can, and I saw the color rise on her cheek.

‘I remember Lady Olivia Wokingham perfectly,’ said the king, in English, with a faint smile upon his face, ‘though I fancy she is hardly able to recall the circumstances under which we met.’

‘Your Majesty’s face seems strangely familiar to me,’ answered Olivia. ‘I saw you yesterday in the

church of S. Rocco, but I feel sure that I have met you somewhere else before that. In fact, I said so to my brother only this evening.'

'You will be the better able to appreciate the compliment I pay you then,' he answered, 'when I say that, while you have forgotten the circumstance, I, who have been here, there, and everywhere since that night, have retained a vivid remembrance of it. Can you recall a journey you made in the Orient Express, when the train stopped at midnight on the Turkish frontier? You wished to make a request to a railway official. The man, however, did not understand English, and some one in the carriage had the pleasure of interpreting.'

'I recollect the incident perfectly now,' cried Olivia; 'and so your Majesty is the gentleman who behaved so kindly to me on that exasperating occasion?'

'It must be very unpleasant not to be able to speak the language of the country one is travelling in,' he replied, gravely. 'For my part, alas, I am compelled to be able to converse fluently in an almost Pentecostal number of tongues, and often a patois of each. My subjects, you see, embrace some of almost every Asiatic nation, besides representatives of a great many European ones.'

At this moment Lady Hammerton begged permis-

sion to present me to him. On hearing my name, the king turned sharply round, and singling me out from the gentlemen among whom I was standing, held out his hand.

‘Lord Instow,’ he said, ‘this is a great and unexpected pleasure. It delights me to meet you at last, and to be able to thank you in person for the service you have rendered the world in general, and myself in particular, by giving it *The Making of Nations*. What your book has been to me, I cannot tell you. I value it beyond measure.’

‘Your Majesty flatters me,’ I said, with an inexplicable feeling of delight at his praise. ‘I am grateful, indeed, to think that you should have found it useful.’

‘Useful is scarcely the term,’ he answered, looking at me with his great dark eyes that had such a wonderful fascination in them. Then, with peculiar emphasis, he continued: ‘Your book, sir, has helped to make me what I am. Upwards of a million people at this present moment have good cause to laud your name. Pray, are you remaining long in Venice?’

‘For another week, I expect,’ I answered, wondering why he asked the question.

‘Indeed! In that case, if you will permit me, I will do myself the honor of calling upon you. I

should like to have a long talk with you on certain matters connected with your volume. When you leave here, it will be to return to England, I presume?"

'No! When my sister and I say good-bye to Venice, we leave Europe in my yacht for the East. We have neither of us seen Japan yet, and we are thinking of taking a long holiday in that direction.'

'You could scarcely choose a more charming place,' he answered, and then turned to his hostess, who had some more friends she was desirous of introducing to him. Half an hour or so later, he encountered Olivia standing by one of the open windows.

'Since you visit it so often, I presume you are fond of Venice, Lady Olivia?' he said, in his low musical voice. 'But there, I need not ask the question, how could one help loving it? What other city has such a history wrapped up in its every stone? I sometimes stand at the window of my own house at night, and look out upon the water. Then it seems to me I see the slow ground ages go floating by on the tide. See, the window is open; may I conduct you outside and ask you what you see?'

He led her through the open window into the balcony. Once there, they stood side by side looking down on the waters of the Grand Canal. It was a



lovely night, a young moon showed faintly above the opposite housetops, touching the water in the centre of the canal with its uncanny light; but on the far side, all was wrapped in deepest shadow. A little farther to the left the Ponte di Rialto showed gray and ghostlike in the semi-darkness. At intervals, a gondola shot out of some side-street and darted round a corner with a cry of warning from the gondolier, otherwise the canal was deserted.

‘Listen to the water,’ said the king, during a pause in the music in the room behind them, placing his hands on the ironwork of the balcony and looking down. ‘What a song it is singing of days gone by. Songs of Anguish, and songs of Triumph, hymns of Victory, and the death-chant of a nation that thought itself so strong that it could never fall, and yet crumbled into dust before those whom it had once boasted it had crushed forever. What a lesson, what a lesson!’

For more than a minute, he stood looking away towards the rising moon. Olivia confessed to me afterwards, when she gave me a recital of the conversation I am now setting down, that the expression of his face, as he spoke, was almost unearthly. It haunted her memory for hours afterwards. At last, he found his voice again, and began to recite:

'I stood in Venice on the Bridge of Sighs,  
A palace and a prison on each hand.  
I saw from out the wave her structures rise  
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand.  
A thousand years their cloudy wings expand  
Around me, and a dying glory smiles  
O'er the far times when many a subject land  
Looked to the winged Lion's marble piles,  
Where Venice sat in state, throned on her hundred isles.'

'Oh, if one could only see it as it used to be,' he said, 'and learn a lesson from it! Think, Lady Olivia, of what this city has been. Think of it first a wind-tossed group of islands, where the streams of the Alps and Tyrol had their meeting, and only the sea-birds found a dwelling-place. It is possible that on this very island, upon which this house now stands, some half-savage king of the Veneti may have stood, and, looking out over the water, have dreamed as I am dreaming now. If only it could have been possible for him to see the glory of the place as it was to be. When driven out of the Euganean hills by his conquerors, he came to build his hut, and dwell in safety on these yellow sands. It was not for him to know the grandeur that was to be its portion in years to come, when Angelo Partecipazio should have completed his gigantic

work, and wrested the islands from the treacherous sea. If only he could have watched the fleets of the new Republic ploughing the waters of the Mediterranean, bearing merchandise to all the great nations of the earth. If he could but have witnessed its ships of war sailing off to the conquest of the Turks, the Saracens, and the Genoese; and have seen its pride growing more and more insufferable each year, what would he not have tried to do to avert the catastrophe? Thirteen hundred years of greatness, and then a fall such as the world has never seen. Heavens! what a lesson could be learned from every ripple and every stone if only they could speak.'

There was something in the man's face that seized upon Olivia's pity. Hitherto she had been almost cold to him, now she leant forward, and placed her hand upon his arm, hardly conscious that she had done so.

'But, sir,' she said, 'you forget that there is another side to the picture. Had it not been for the overweening pride you speak of, and such careless statesmanship as men would scarce believe, Venice might be the centre of the world's commerce to-day, as she was five hundred years ago.'

The king stooped a little towards her. His eyes shone in the bright light like diamonds, and his

voice, when he spoke, had a clearer ring than it had yet possessed.

‘You are right,’ he said, ‘you are quite right. It is the sin of pride, of overweening confidence in one’s self, that a ruler must guard against, more than masterstrokes of diplomacy. Oh, for one hour’s prevision of my country’s future! What would I not give for it! Lady Olivia, in all your brilliant life, your social conquests, there is one sweet you have not tasted. You do not know the joy of winning a kingdom against enormous odds, and establishing a dynasty for one’s self. I doubt even if you, clever as you are, understand what it means to an ambitious man like myself to know that I have done it by the strength of my own right arm. Indeed, I doubt very much if I know exactly the extent of my own feelings.’

‘I think I can hazard a very good guess.’

‘You have heard my story, then?’

‘I have heard what was supposed to be your story, but whether it is the correct version I cannot of course tell. You see I have no means of judging.’

‘Well, some day, if you will allow me, I will tell you my history myself. I think you will say that you have never heard a stranger.’

‘But you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have succeeded. No one can rob you of that.’

'I have succeeded up to the present, but the question that haunts me day and night is, shall I continue to do so? There are so many difficulties in the way, and sometimes the path lies over such steep hills, that it seems hopeless to expect that one will ever arrive at the top.'

'That is not the account I have heard of you. Only to-day I had you described to me as a man of dauntless energy, whose boast it is that he does not know the meaning of the word "fail!"'

'Ah, I fear your informant flattered me. But I agree with you that is what the man who is to succeed must be. I must rouse myself, I must throw off this depression which has seized me, and play the part of a man. The truth is, I have been ill; I was only induced to leave my country when it became absolutely certain that unless I did so I should die. I went to Hong-kong, but they advised me to come home to Europe and consult a specialist. I came here, and next week I am to learn my fate. One tries not to be a coward, Lady Olivia, but one cannot help dreading what one may be told. So much depends upon my life, you see, the happiness of thousands, the fate of a new throne, even the independence of a country.'

Olivia looked up into the pale, handsome face of the king, and, as she did so, she heaved a heavy sigh.

‘Will you believe me when I say how much I pity you?’ she asked. ‘I sympathise with you from the bottom of my heart.’

‘I thank you,’ he answered. ‘When I interpreted for you on the Turkish frontier that dark night years ago, I was leaving Europe with all the world before me. My future was a blank page, on which I had then to write my name. It is a strange coincidence that, when I return to Europe, my name assured, you should be the first woman to whom I un-bare my soul. But I must not detain you here. The night is growing cold, and our hostess will be wondering where we are.’

Olivia rose with a little shiver. Whether it was the damp night air, or the effect of the king’s words, she could not say, but she felt more miserable than she had done for some time past. Inside the drawing-room the musicians were playing a selection from Gounod’s *Faust*; and the plaintive melody seemed in keeping with her thoughts. She could not divest herself of the idea that it was all unreal. It was like a dream, vivid while it lasted, but from which she might expect any moment to awake. The moon rising above the house-tops, the dark shadow of the buildings opposite, the cries of the gondoliers as they turned into the narrow streets to right and left, the music in the room behind, and the

mysterious King of the Medangs standing beside her, telling her of his throne, and the jeopardy in which his life was placed.

He pushed open the window for her, and escorted her into the room, where they found their hostess near the door, talking to the English consul. Bidding her good-night, and thanking her for her hospitality, the king accompanied Sir John down-stairs, followed by his aide-de-camp. On the stairs I encountered them.

'Good-night, my lord,' said the king, pausing for a moment to speak to me. 'I must repeat what a pleasure it has been to me to meet you. Perhaps, if you can spare the time, you will pay me a visit before you leave Venice; I shall be so glad to see you.'

'I will do myself the honor of waiting upon your Majesty whenever it will be most convenient to you to see me,' I answered.

'Shall we say on Saturday, then? At three o'clock, if that will suit you.'

'Three o'clock will suit me admirably,' I answered. 'I will be sure not to keep your Majesty waiting.'

'I thank you. Good-night.'

I bade him good-night, and then went on up-stairs to the drawing-room, in search of Olivia. When I had found her, we made our adieux, thanked our

hostess for the honor she had done us in introducing us to the king, and took our departure. One thing impressed me immediately, and that was my sister's quietness. We were no sooner under weigh than I rallied her on the subject by inquiring, now that she had seen His Majesty, the King of the Medangs, what she thought of him.

'I don't know what to think,' she answered. 'Victor, there is something very extraordinary about the man. Some magnetic quality that I cannot understand. Since I have spoken to him, I can only say that I do not at all wonder he has succeeded. He is the sort of man who would carry any enterprise through, however difficult. But I fancy he is very ill.'

'Ill?'

'Yes, very ill. He told me that that was the reason of his being here now. He is very despondent, and the way he spoke of the future of his country, if anything should happen to himself, almost brought the tears to my eyes.'

'He has asked me to call upon him on Saturday. I shall do so, but to-morrow I shall write to Blenkinson and ask him to let me hear by return of post all he knows of him. If there is a man in the world who is likely to know—he is that one.'



‘Doesn’t that seem a little as if we hardly trusted him?’ asked Olivia. ‘Ought we to make inquiries in that way, do you think?’

I looked at her in surprise. Could this be the same woman who, only that morning, had spoken of him as a mere adventurer? Verily, I thought to myself, if this is a sample of what he can do, His Majesty has indeed the power of converting his opponents to his own side. But whatever I may have thought, I was too wise in my generation to say anything to Olivia on the subject.

## CHAPTER III.

## I HELP THE KING.

In placing before you the circumstances which brought about the curious adventure which it is the purpose of this narrative to relate, my one dread is, that you may not see it in the light I intend, and that you may therefore set down the action as being too precipitate to be likely to influence a man of my admittedly peculiar temperament. If you do come to this conclusion I will forgive you. Indeed, I will go even further than that, and confess that you have every excuse for so thinking, for now that I come to look through what I have written, myself, I find that it impresses me in the same way to a very large extent. In reality, however, short as was our acquaintance with the curious individual who had constituted himself King of the Medangs by such romantic, though unorthodox means, we found ourselves, by the time we had met him a dozen times, regarding him with just that sort of friendliness we should feel for a person whom we had known

all our lives long. Having told you this, it would seem trite to describe him as a man of extraordinary parts, for, to be plain with you, I have never met such another in the whole course of my experience.

During my first interview with him, as arranged at Lady Hammerton's 'At Home,' I was permitted an opportunity of studying his character more carefully than I had yet done. I found him diplomatic in his utterances, very reserved as to his own opinions, if possible a little too prone to look for interested motives in others, and yet with it all, if such an anomaly can be understood, generous and impetuous to the last degree. His territory, so I gathered, lay somewhere in the hinterland of Annam, a fertile region clearly capable, if his account could be relied on, of great developments. Of his earlier exploits in the country he said not a word, nor did he tell me any of his adventures connected with the usurpation of the throne. He spoke modestly of his own achievements, but referred with gratitude to the help he had received from the white men he had imported later on. As far as I could gather, the chief thorns in his side were the Jesuit priests who, though they had welcomed him as king in the beginning, and had derived considerable benefit from his rule, seemed determined to leave no stone unturned to harass and annoy him. He also accused

ld them of trafficking with his neighbors the French,  
ry whose Government you must understand had tac-  
et itly recognised him as monarch of the country. For  
e. nearly two hours we sat in the balcony of his house  
at talking and looking down on the canal, and during  
in every minute of that time I seemed to be coming  
e nearer and nearer to a proper understanding of the  
ic man. I may tell you that the fascination he had  
1. exercised over me since I had first set eyes on him  
r. had in no way abated, and I was now doing my ut-  
h most to strengthen it by a sincere admiration.  
1. When I rose to go, he held out his hand.

1. 'Good-bye, my lord,' he said, 'I have to thank you  
a for your call. I have enjoyed my conversation with  
j you immensely.' Then, as if an afterthought had  
r struck him, he added, 'I trust your sister, Lady  
j Olivia, is quite well?'

e 'Thank you, she is in the best of health,' I an-  
f swered. 'She has met some English acquaintances  
a this afternoon, and is showing them the sights of  
a Venice. I think my sister informed me that your  
Majesty intended to obtain an opinion from a doc-  
tor here regarding your own health?'

1 'I am to see him on Monday next,' he answered,  
with a look in his eyes that at the time I did not  
understand; 'then I shall know my fate. I find that  
it takes all the fortitude one possesses to meet it

bravely. When one is playing for such high stakes, it seems so hard to have to run the risk of losing all through ill-health, does it not?"

'But perhaps there is nothing really wrong with you. Some little disorder which will soon be set right. We must pray for you, and hope for the best.'

'I should be grateful for your prayers,' he answered, with that literal seriousness which I soon discovered was characteristic of the man. 'God knows I want to live. I have so much work before me. When do you leave Venice; have you decided yet?'

'We have made up our minds to remain for a week longer,' I replied. 'I am having some improvements made on board my yacht, and she will not be ready before that time.'

'Then I trust I may be able to persuade you to give me the pleasure of your company again. Your society is both pleasant and profitable to me.'

'Your Majesty honors me, I am sure,' I answered. 'I shall place myself at your disposal whenever you care to see me. Good-bye.'

We shook hands, and I went down-stairs.

As De Trailles had said, the owner of the house, whoever or whatever he or she may have been, furnished and managed it superbly while the king was

in it. A more beautiful residence could not have been desired, and as I made my way down the stairs, and saw the crowd of lackeys spring to attention in the hall, I could only use the old expression familiar to our childhood, and say that it was a palace 'fit for a king.' I felt, however, that I would have given something to have known the secret of it all.

When I reached the Hotel Galaghetti, I found Olivia already returned from her excursion. She inquired after the king's health, and I noticed that when she spoke of him, there was a different look upon her face than it had worn that day when we met him for the first time in the church of S. Rocco. And yet Olivia has not the reputation of being, by any manner of means, a woman easily impressed.

'You seem to be very much interested in the King of the Medangs, Olivia,' I said, with a smile, after I had described my visit.

'Could one help being so when one had once met him?' she answered. 'It irritates me now to think that I ever scoffed at him. When do you expect to hear from Lord Blenkinson?'

'On Monday, I hope.'

'You will let me know what he says, will you not?'

'I think I may very safely promise to do that,' I answered. Then, as if on an afterthought, I turned

to her and took her hand. 'Olivia,' I said, 'I hope, my dear, you will forgive me for what I am about to say—but—but—well, to put it bluntly, you know the extraordinary fascination this man exercises over people. There is no fear of'——?

'Of my falling in love with him, I suppose you are going to say,' she cried, her cheeks flaming. 'You need not exercise yourself on that score. I am not a schoolgirl that I should fall in love with every man with whom I am brought in contact.'

'I should be miserable if I thought I had offended you, dear,' I said, as I placed my arm round her waist. 'I had no other intention than to warn you. For there can be no denying the fact, the man is undeniably handsome; he has also just that savor of romance about him that appeals with such irresistible force to the majority of women.'

'Thank you,' she answered, a little haughtily. 'I hope you will not include me in the category. His Majesty is most charming, I admit, still I fancy I have met a sufficiency of charming men to be able to steel my heart against his fascinations. It is hard upon a woman that she cannot sympathise with a man who has set his heart upon great deeds, without its being supposed that she must necessarily fall in love with him. I cannot help thinking you are unjust, Instow.'

With this Parthian shot, she rose from her chair,

and left the room. That I had offended her I had no doubt, and that I was sorry I had done so was equally certain, but at the same time, I could not help congratulating myself, should there have been anything of the sort in trail, on my astuteness in having warned her in time. I loved my sister, and I am also immensely proud of her; and, however romantic and fascinating the King of the Medangs might prove, I had no desire that he should spoil her life for her.

The thought that Olivia's heart might prove susceptible to His Majesty's influence had hitherto been the one thing which had prevented me from cultivating his acquaintance as thoroughly as I should like to have done. Now, however, that I was reassured on that point, I resolved to avail myself, as far as was possible, of all the opportunities which presented themselves of seeing him. There was not the slightest difficulty in this, and by the time Blenkinson's letter arrived, which was on the Tuesday following the conversation above narrated, I began to think I was as familiar with his character as one man could well be with another's. The letter ran as follows:

‘The Foreign Office, 12th March 18—.

‘Dear Instow—My hearty thanks are due to you for your letter of Wednesday last. I should have replied to it sooner had I been able to lay my hand



at once upon the papers connected with the matter to which you refer. You ask me what information I can give you regarding one Marie David de Merant, who styles himself King of the Medangs. The following is, I imagine, all that is generally known concerning that romantic, and, if a Foreign Minister may so far commit himself, very interesting personage.

‘From what is known of him it is supposed that Merant made his first appearance in the East, during the years 1880 and 1881, in the French Colony of Tonquin, where he saw service in guerilla warfare against the Chinese pirates that abound along the coast. In 1883 he left the French, and joined the Dutch, fought against the Atchinese, and proved himself made of such good metal that he was entrusted with the command of a regiment employed on special duty. In 1885 he turned up in Hong-kong, where he remained for a week, and then vanished in the direction of Japan, staying there six months or thereabouts, eventually returning to Tonquin on some mysterious errand, the exact importance of which was by no means understood then. Eighteen months later, however, it was announced that he had invaded a country at the back of Annam, inhabited by a tribe called the Medangs, and had appointed himself Regent for the imbecile

king, then upon the throne. Early in 1888 we were officially informed that he had declared himself king, with the full and free consent of the people; had signed treaties with the adjoining tribes, was fast developing the country, and more extraordinary still, by the exercise of almost superhuman impudence and diplomacy, had induced his big neighbor, France, to accept him at his own valuation. Since then it is understood he has proved himself a beneficent ruler; the country has made wonderful progress, its industries are being developed in every direction, and if only the present ruler remains at the head of affairs, which is always a matter of chance in those regions, and the French do not see fit to change their present line of action as far as he is concerned, there is no saying what his future may not be. One glance at the map will show you that beyond a contingent interest in the welfare of Siam, England has no share in the question, France, China and Siam being the only nations brought into close contact with the Medangs. For this reason, we neither countenance nor oppose him. I trust my information may be of service to you. If I can help you in any other way, you know how gladly I will do so. With kind regards to Lady Olivia and yourself, believe me, my dear Instow, always cordially yours,

BLENKINSON.'

I read the letter carefully through, and then placed it in my pocket. The man's career, as here set forth, agreed very well with what I had been told. I felt glad that there was nothing in it of which any one could feel ashamed. His personality had interested me more than anything had done for years past; and I should have been sorry indeed had I found him out in anything discreditable. When I was with him I seemed to partake of his enthusiasm, to catch a glimpse of the object of his life, and to feel rising up in my heart the thrill of the most deadly of all ambitions, that of throne creating.

When Olivia came down to breakfast I showed her the letter I had received. She read it in silence, and after she had finished it, handed it back to me. I waited for her to speak, but it was some moments before she did so.

'If I were His Majesty, I think I should be a very proud man,' she said, with a sparkle in her eye that I could not help noticing. 'How many kings can claim to have accomplished so much in so short a time?'

'If what Blenkinson says is true, and I have no reason to suppose it is not, he is a wonderful man, indeed,' I answered; and then changed the subject by inquiring what she intended doing with herself

that morning. She replied that she had arranged to call upon Lady Hammerton at eleven, in order to go shopping with her. I was glad of this, for I wanted to be alone to write some letters, and to execute some business at the English Consulate.

While she was speaking, a servant approached us. He informed me that a person of the name of Wells was in the hall, and desired to speak to me.

‘Wells? Then the yacht has arrived,’ I said, turning to Olivia. ‘Now we must make up our minds when we shall leave Venice.’

I thought that Olivia’s face suddenly turned a little pale, but for several reasons I did not comment on it. I rather let her go to her room, and went out into the hall to find my skipper. He informed me that the repairs I had authorised to be made in the yacht had been effected sooner than he expected, and that everything was now in readiness for the voyage to the East, whenever I was prepared to start. I told him I would communicate with him later on in the day, and then returned to my daily paper.

It was nearly half-past eleven by the time Olivia was ready to go out. I hailed a gondola for her, and put her into it, and then set off on my own concerns. On reaching Sir John’s residence, she went

up the steps, and inquired from the butler if Lady Hammerton were at home.

'Her ladyship is in, my lady,' answered the man, 'but I fear she cannot see you. Her ladyship, I regret to say, is indisposed to-day, and is confined to her bed.'

'I am exceedingly sorry to hear it,' said Olivia. 'Will you please give her my love and inform her that I called?'

'I will be sure to do so, my lady,' replied the man; and Olivia was turning to go down the steps to her gondola again, when she became aware of a man who had just disembarked, and was coming up. One glance told her that it was the King of the Medangs. He raised his hat, and as he did so, Olivia noticed how haggard and worn his face had grown.

'Good-morning, Lady Olivia,' he said. 'Have you been calling upon Lady Hammerton?'

'I was going shopping with her this morning,' Olivia replied, 'but I have just been informed that she is not well, and is unable to leave her room to-day. I am the more sorry as I fear it may be the last chance I shall have of seeing her.'

'Indeed. Are you then contemplating leaving Venice so soon?'

'We may leave at any moment now,' she answered.

'The yacht arrived this morning, and I fancy my brother is eager to be off.'

The King was silent for a few moments. Then he said, very slowly:

'I am sorry to hear that you are going. It seems my fate to make new friends only to lose them again as quickly. I wonder if you would dismiss your gondola, and permit me to walk back with you to your hotel? You were kind enough last week to say that you would like to hear my doctor's report. I have received it to-day.'

She looked up at him and colored a little as she acceded to his request. He accordingly dismissed both gondolas, and returning to my sister's side, escorted her down the river towards the Rialto Bridge.

'And what has your doctor told you?' asked Olivia, as they walked along. 'I hope he has relieved you of some of your anxiety.'

'He has relieved me of my anxiety, I must confess,' replied the other with a grim smile. 'But hardly in the way I understand you to mean. I have no longer the dread uncertainty hanging over me, for I know my fate!'

She hesitated a little before she put her next question.

'And what has he told you?'

'Ah! can you not guess?' he asked. 'The sum total of his report is that under ordinary circumstances I have not two years to live.'

Olivia uttered a little cry of horror. She could hardly believe that she heard aright. Apart from his thin face and large sunken eyes, the man looked strong and well enough. Seeing her consternation, he was quick to express his sorrow.

'I should not have told you so abruptly,' he said. 'It was wrong of me, and I ask your pardon. In the presence of one's own misfortune, one forgets to think of others. Can you forgive me?'

'There is nothing to forgive,' she answered. 'But, oh, I cannot believe that it is as bad as you say. Surely you must have misunderstood what was said to you. There are other doctors in Europe. See them. Try Paris—try London—try Berlin. Seek the cleverest men; they may tell you differently.'

He only shook his head.

'I have seen so many now,' he said, 'and though they differ in one or two minor details, they agree in the main essentials. No, Lady Olivia, I know the bitter truth at last. Hard as he has worked, terribly as he has toiled, I fear Marie the First's reign is nearly at an end. Another two years, and the kingdom I have devoted my life to building up, will fall

again to the ground like a house of cards. I have been ploughing in sand, that is all.'

She saw that he was quite unstrung, and with quick womanly tact, endeavored to divert his thoughts into another channel. She was too artistic, however, to do so by changing the subject altogether.

'I suppose in this case you will soon be thinking of returning to your country?' she said.

'God knows,' he answered. 'Now that I have learned the truth, I hardly know whether I shall ever go back. What can I do there?'

'But you must go back,' she cried, pressing her advantage. 'The country requires you more than ever.'

'The country will soon have to do without me altogether,' he replied. 'But there, Lady Olivia, I must not talk to you any more about my wretched self, or you will set me down as a coward. You do not think I have proved myself one so far, do you?'

'I shall never think you a coward,' she answered. 'Have I not heard your story?'

She could scarcely have paid him a more delicate compliment, and it was evident he appreciated it at its full value.

They were crossing the Rialto bridge by this time. About midway the king stopped, and standing side



by side, they looked down at the Canal. It was a lovely morning—overhead the blue sky was flecked with swift flying clouds, and beneath them the green water of the canal danced and curtsied to the fresh breeze. Here and there gondolas dotted its surface, but the great thoroughfare was scarcely as busy as usual.

For some little time neither spoke—the king was gazing down at the water, as if trying to make up his mind to say something, and yet hardly caring to do so, not knowing what answer he might receive.

Olivia looked at him with great pity upon her face.

‘May I know what you are thinking of?’ she said, when the silence had lasted upwards of three minutes.

He gave a little start as she spoke, showing thereby how far away his thoughts had been.

‘I must beg your pardon,’ he answered quickly. ‘I am afraid I make but a poor companion. What was I thinking? I fear I can hardly tell you. Perhaps I was wondering at the seeming contrariness of Fate. I intended to do so much, I started so well, and now that the game is in my own hands, I am plucked out of it, like a flower that is just opening to the sun.’

He moved a little closer to where she leant her arms upon the coping of the ancient bridge. The

expression on his face was sadder than she had ever yet seen it.

‘Lady Olivia, I think if you only knew how much I intended to do—what lofty aims and aspirations I had, you would give me all your divine pity.’

‘But I do pity you, sir. I have told you that I pity you with my whole heart.’

There were tears in her eyes, and the king would have noticed them had his thoughts not been elsewhere.

‘I dreamed such dreams of all I was going to do. I found my kingdom going begging, and having taken possession of it, I devoted my life to building it up. It has been my child, my all. I have thought for it, schemed for it, nay, even fought for it. At first I could make no headway at all. The people were orientals, and their prejudices against me were in their blood. But I was patient; I humored them; I taught them to respect me, and at last I won their confidence, and next their love. This once gained, little by little I began my work of improving them. Here again I had to exercise all my caution, their ways were not European ways, and customs and traditions that have been handed down from father to son from generation to generation for hundreds of years are difficult foes to fight. But still, by unlimited patience and perseverance, I began to

make headway. My staff, all picked men, helped me; the French priests, having discovered that I was not going to interfere with their mission work, lent me their co-operation, and every year saw my kingdom growing in power and solidity. I pictured myself as the founder of a country that should in time take its place among the great nations of the earth. Physically there could not be a more enchanting land. It is the Garden of Eden itself. My people are strong and industrious; with proper tuition, they make the best of workmen. They are patriotic, and in capable hands can be manufactured into excellent soldiers. I have a standing army of five thousand men, recruited and drilled by European officers, and at a day's notice I can raise reserves of twice that number. Having accomplished all this in so short a time, what could I not have done in another ten years had I only been spared?

'But you will be spared. I cannot believe that it is as bad as you say.'

'Ah! again you think to cheer me. But alas, nothing you can say can alter what I have been told must happen. My lungs are seriously affected.'

'But if you are careful—if you do implicitly as the doctors tell you—then surely your life may be spared for years to come.'

'You try to make me see the bright side—but alas!

the decree has gone forth, and I cannot shut my eyes to the truth. No, no! Let us talk of something else. Remember after to-day, if you are going away so soon, I probably shall not see you again. After to-day we shall only be memories to each other. It seems to me, Lady Olivia, as if I had known you all your life.'

She hung her head a little, and it might have been the reflection from her sunshade that gave the color to her face as she answered:

'And I, your Majesty.'

'If you could only understand how pleasant our intercourse has been to me. Kings, Lady Olivia, are at the best but lonely men. Even such small kings as I. And yet we try to make friends.'

'But you have many friends.'

'I fear not! I fear not. I only wish I could think otherwise. Oh, if we could implicitly trust those about us, how different life would be! I have been deceived so often that I sometimes wonder I have any faith left in human nature. Small as my kingdom is, it is surrounded by jealous foes. China would wrest it from me were she strong enough; France has long cast envious eyes upon it. Even now I am never certain when the latter may not find a pretext and endeavor to take it from me. But

she shall not have it without a struggle. Of that I am determined.

'You would fight to the bitter end to prevent such an injustice?' cried Olivia. 'What right has France to your kingdom? It is yours by right and might, and yours it must continue. Let her be content with what she has already.'

'Ah,' replied the king, 'I fear you have but a small knowledge of the ambition of a nation. France has more than she can manage already, but that is no reason why she should not endeavour to take my ewe lamb from me.'

'But you will not let her. I have no fear. I know you too well for that.'

As she said this Olivia drew herself up proudly and looked at the man she addressed. Had such an action been necessary, I believe she would have girded a sword upon her thigh, and gone forth to his rescue, like a second Maid of Orleans.

'No; I shall not let her, if I can prevent it; you may be very sure of that. But the question is, can I prevent it?'

'You must—you must. It would be the cruellest injustice that she should have it.'

There was a light in his eyes like the flash of steel. It was evident he was about to answer her

in a similar strain, but he stopped himself suddenly, and drew a little closer to her side.

'Lady Olivia,' he said, and his voice throbbed with the intensity of his emotion. 'If I am ever called upon to do battle for my kingdom, shall I have your good wishes for my success?'

As if in anticipation of what might follow her reply, my sister turned suddenly very pale.

'You will always have my good wishes,' she answered, and then, as if she had said too much, she hastened to add, 'You have right and justice on your side—how could I help but sympathise with you.'

'You will only wish me well then, because I shall be in the right of the quarrel?'

She glanced swiftly at him, and then as swiftly withdrew her eyes.

'You press me to a disadvantage.'

'And pardon my saying so, you endeavor to turn me from the point at issue. Forgive my importunities. I should not have worried you with my questions. I am always so thoughtless.'

'You have not worried me; I am proud to answer you. I sympathise with you, because you are a brave man, and I think you try to be a good ruler. I cannot say more than that.'

'I will not ask you to do so,' he answered gently.

'I must consider myself fortunate to have won so much where so many have failed.'

After that there was another silence; then Olivia, having stolen a glance at her watch, suggested that it would be as well if they continued their walk. His Majesty agreed, and, side by side, they accordingly crossed the bridge, and made their way in the direction of Galaghetti's hotel.

When they reached the steps, the king paused, and held out his hand.

'Good-bye, Lady Olivia,' he said; 'I am very grateful to you for your sympathy. I shall remember your kindness all the days of my life.'

She was pulling off her gloves, and, as she extended her hand, one of them fell to the ground. The king stooped and picked it up. In the excitement of the moment, he did not return it, nor did she, strangely enough, ask him for it.

'Good-bye,' she answered, and then added, with a little quaver in her voice—'and may God protect your Majesty.'

'Amen,' he answered, and then replaced his hat upon his head, and went down the steps, while she entered the building.

She found me in the drawing-room, cutting the pages of a new book I had that morning purchased. As I greeted her, I saw that she was deathly pale,

and for a moment I thought she was going to faint. But, as she insisted that she had never felt better in her life, I was constrained to believe her, against the evidence of my senses.

‘And how did you find Lady Hammerton?’ I inquired, when she had seated herself.

‘I did not see her,’ she answered. ‘The poor thing is not well, and is confined to her room. I had my journey for nothing.’

‘I can sympathise with you. I, too, had my excursion for nothing—the Consul is not at his office to-day. But you are late. How did you put in your time? You have been gone nearly two hours.’

She rose from her chair; and, picking up her parasol, prepared to leave the room.

‘My dear Instow—,’ she said, ‘how very curious you are. One would imagine, by the way you talk, that I am too young to be trusted alone. Venice is not Central Africa; a woman is as safe by herself in the streets here as in Piccadilly.’

Like a prudent man, seeing the way the wind blew, I held my tongue; but it was some time before I gave up wondering why she declined to tell me.

After lunch I was smoking a cigar in the smoking-room, when a servant entered with a note upon a salver. He handed it to me, and stood waiting for an answer. The envelope, which was addressed in a



bold handwriting, was perfectly plain, but the paper it contained bore, in the left-hand top corner, a small gold crown. To my surprise, it was from the king's aide-de-camp, and ran as follows:

'Dear Lord Instow—Could you make it convenient to call upon His Majesty immediately on receipt of this? By doing so, you would be rendering him a great service.—Yours very faithfully,

'CONRAD MANOLAKI'

I scrawled a note to say that I would start at once, and then went up-stairs to prepare myself for the visit. What could His Majesty want with me, I wondered, as I dressed.

On reaching the palace, I found that my arrival was expected. The aide-de-camp, Manolaki, was waiting to receive me, and, as soon as I was announced, he came forward.

'His Majesty is most anxious to see you, my lord,' he said. 'If you will follow me, I will conduct you to his presence.'

We ascended the great stairs together, and eventually reached a room in which I had never been before. It was furnished as a study, and I found the king pacing up and down in it. He was plainly in a state of agitation, and directly he saw me, he came over to where I stood, and shook me warmly by the hand. I noticed that he was no

longer the apathetic, listless man I had hitherto found him, but showed himself now, as he must have been when he took the throne of the Medangs, quick, eager, and resourceful, with an eye that spoke for his command of men, and a brain that enabled him to make the most of every possible advantage. I never encountered a greater change in a human being.

‘I am obliged to you for your promptness in responding to my request, my lord,’ he said. ‘I took the liberty of sending for you, as the matter upon which I desire to consult you is of the utmost importance. To be brief with you, I think you are my friend?’

‘I desire that you should always so consider me,’ I answered. ‘If there is any means by which I can prove it, I shall be glad if you will tell me.’

‘It is in your power, and I will show you how. See here.’ He crossed to the writing-table in the centre of the room, and took from it a slip of paper, which he handed to me. ‘This is a telegram in cipher from my prime-minister,’ he said. ‘Translated, it means, “Return with all haste. Fear serious trouble impending with the French.”’

I held the paper in my hand, and looked from it to the king, then back again.

'I fear I do not quite understand,' I said. 'In what way can I be of assistance to you?'

The king wheeled round, and fixed his eager eyes upon me.

'From this message, you will understand that it is absolutely imperative that I should reach my country as soon as possible. In fact, I have already replied to the effect that I am coming. But how to do it puzzles me. The P. and O. steamer sailed yesterday for the East. There is not another boat leaving here for three weeks. I must be off without a day's delay, and endeavor to intercept a Messagerie boat at Port Said. I sent for you in order to ask if your lordship will convey me thither. Remember a kingdom's happiness hangs upon your answer.'

I replied without a second's thought. All my preparations were complete. I should travel faster than the majority of mail-boats. What was to prevent me from taking him all the way.

'I will gladly do more than you ask,' I answered, catching something of his enthusiasm. 'If you will accept my hospitality, I will convey you to your kingdom. My boat is ready, and we can leave to-night, if you wish. By that means you will save some days.'

The king's face lit up with smiles.

'I thank you, my friend,' he replied, shaking me

by the hand. 'I thank you from the bottom of my heart. If ever I can repay you this service, be certain I will do so.'

'When will you be ready to start?'

'In an hour's time, if necessary. This inaction kills me—I must be doing.'

'Shall we say ten o'clock to-night?'

'By all means. At ten o'clock I will be ready. Manolaki will remain behind to settle everything. He can follow as soon as possible.'

'Then I will go out at once, and give the necessary instructions. You know my vessel?'

'The Ianthé? I saw her only to-day, lying beyond the Custom House. I will join you on board at ten.'

'In the meantime, I will bid your Majesty au revoir.'

'Au revoir, and many, many thanks. You are a friend in need.'

'I trust I may prove a friend in deed.'

With that I made my exit, and set off, first to the yacht, where I gave Wells the necessary instructions, and then back to the hotel. Olivia met me on the stairs.

'Can you be ready to leave Venice at ten o'clock to-night?' I asked, as I greeted her.

My abruptness must have startled her, for she gazed at me in astonishment.

'My dear Instow, how impetuous you are,' she said, when she had recovered a little from her surprise. 'This morning you had no idea when you would start; it might be to-morrow, it might be next week; now you want me to pack up and be off in a few hours.'

'There are urgent reasons for hastening our departure, dear,' I replied; 'you must not blame me.'

'But what reason can be so urgent as to demand this hurry?' she asked.

'I have seen the king,' I answered, as if there were but one sovereign in the world and he lived in Venice. 'He has received important news from his kingdom that necessitates his immediate return.'

It may have been my fancy, but I could not help thinking her face had grown a little paler.

'But how does that affect us?' she asked. 'What have we to do with His Majesty's movements?'

'As he has just missed the boat here, and it is unlikely he will catch one at Port Said, I have offered to convey him to his country,' I answered. 'I hope you have no objection?'

I expected to see her express some pleasure at the prospect of helping the man for whom she had shown so much admiration, but, to my surprise, she seemed to take my action in ill part. One might have been excused had one imagined, from her behavior, that

the king's presence was likely to prove distasteful to her, so unsympathetically did she greet the announcement of his coming. However, I did not argue with her, but went off to find my man, that I might tell him to pack at once.

By nine o'clock Olivia and I were on board; shortly before ten His Majesty made his appearance, and, almost while the clocks were striking, the anchor was raised, and the screw began to revolve. An hour later we were well out in the Adriatic, and beautiful Venice was a thing of the past.

## CHAPTER IV.

## WE REACH THE MEDANGS.

Of our voyage from Venice to the Medang River I find, on looking through my diary, that there is little or nothing of importance to tell. We reached Colombo, where we had arranged to call for coal, two days in advance of the French mail-boat, and nearly a week ahead of the P. and O. steamer by which the king would, in all probability, have otherwise been compelled to travel. The stamp of the engines resounded night and day, and every noon the record of our progress was hailed with eager acclamation. It was extraordinary how every one on board the boat, from the person most interested, down to the very ship's boys, seemed to be impressed with the necessity of speed. I think of all the gifts vouchsafed to man, the most enviable is the power of affecting others with a participation in one's own desires, such as the King of the Medangs undoubtedly possessed. Sometimes, when I lay awake in the still watches of the night, I found myself almost

wondering at my position. What was there in this man, I asked myself, to compel me to such haste, to make me spend my money so recklessly, to induce me, who detested haste so cordially, to forego my carefully planned arrangements, and find no satisfaction so great as the frothing of the water under our bows, and the high figures recorded on our patent log? And yet when I was in his company, it never occurred to me for an instant to wonder. I paced the deck by his side, cast anxious glances at the weather, prayed that no storm might arise to hinder us, and continually interrogated the captain and engineers as to the progress of the boat.

Under the influence of his excitement, our passenger's despondency about his own health seemed entirely to have left him. Never once did he refer to his doctor's report in any shape or form. He was occupied from morning till night, plotting and planning, and preparing himself for every possible contingency that might await him on arrival in his dominions. Sometimes he made me his confidant, at others he would keep himself strictly to himself. At all times, however, he was consideration and courtesy itself. A guest more charming, or one more easily pleased, it would have been scarcely possible to find.

When Ceylon was once behind us, and we were



steaming across the Indian Ocean, bound for Singapore as fast as our engines would take us, every one's restlessness seemed to increase by leaps and bounds. In less than a fortnight we should reach our destination, and our friend would know the worst.

On the afternoon of the day that we entered the Straits of Malacca, I was seated near the saloon-companion reading, when the captain descended the ladder from the bridge, and came to speak with me.

'I am sorry to have to tell you, my lord,' he said abruptly, as he touched his cap, 'that the engineer thinks he is running short of coal.'

There was always a standing feud between the bridge and the engine-room, and Wells was only too glad to have a chance of presenting his enemies to me in an unfavorable light. I therefore resolved to make inquiries before I committed myself to any line of action.

'How much has he still in the bunkers?' I inquired.

'Plenty,' he says, 'to take us into the Gulf of Siam,' was the answer, 'but not sufficient to see us across it.'

'You infer by that, I suppose, that we shall have to call at Singapore,' I continued. 'That will mean a long delay and, as you know, under the present circumstances, every hour is of importance.'

'I am quite aware of that, my lord,' he replied, with an aggrieved face. 'I told Mr. M'Gill so myself only ten minutes since.'

'Send Mr. M'Gill to me, if you please,' I said. 'This is a very serious matter, and we must not decide hastily.'

A moment or two later the skipper returned with the engineer, a weather-beaten old Scotchman who had been in the service of my family ever since he had been able to earn his daily bread. I questioned him on the subject of the coal, only to learn that it was necessary beyond doubt that we must call at Singapore, otherwise we should be unable to reach our destination. There was nothing for it but to make the best of a bad bargain. I accordingly gave the required instructions, and rose from my chair to go and inform the person chiefly concerned. Just, however, as I was about to enter the saloon-companion, I espied him coming up the stairs from below. When he reached the deck I turned and walked with him to the rails. He looked eagerly at me.

'You have some bad news for me, Lord Instow,' he said, with that peculiar abruptness characteristic of him. 'I can see it in your face. What has happened?'

'Something that will cause you some annoyance I fear,' I answered. 'The chief engineer has just been

to me to say that he has not sufficient coal in his bunkers to carry us to our destination. Steaming at the pace we have done has caused the store we took in at Colombo to vanish in half its ordinary time, and we must therefore put into Singapore for a fresh supply.'

The king's face clouded ominously.

'Another delay,' he muttered, 'another delay. And every hour of vital importance.'

He walked a few paces from me and I saw his fists clench, and his mouth harden. Suddenly he wheeled round, and came back to my side.

'I am proving myself sadly ungrateful,' he said, 'after all your kindness to me. I hope you will forgive me. For a moment, I must confess, I was disappointed, for I am so eager to get to my kingdom that I can bear no delays. But I know that you are as sorry as I am. How long do you think it will take us to get in a fresh supply?'

'At most not more than five hours,' I answered. 'I cannot tell you how vexed I am that such a thing should have occurred. But I fear it could not be helped.'

'Say no more about it, I beg of you,' he answered. 'In any case, we shall be there some days before I could possibly have reached it in the ordinary course of events.'

‘And then you will know everything. And your mind will be set at rest.’

‘Yes. I shall know everything,’ he replied, with an infinite sadness in his voice. ‘How much that means, “know everything!” But there is one question I have been wishing to ask you every day. When you have deposited me at my destination, what do you and your sister intend doing?’

‘We had thought of calling at Haiphong, and then proceeding on our way to Japan,’ I answered.

‘Are you in any great hurry to reach the Land of the Chrysanthemum?’

‘No,’ I replied. ‘We are idle folk, and there is no particular need of haste.’

‘Then why not stay with me for a week or two? I should like nothing better than to have an opportunity of repaying all the kindnesses I have received at your hands. There is much to be seen, believe me, and to one who, like yourself, takes such a vivid interest in the building up of new countries, there are endless traits to be studied in the people themselves. Come, Lord Instow, what do you say? Will you remain with me for a while?’

He looked at me with his dark lustrous eyes, as if more than I could guess depended upon my answer.

‘I should enjoy it immensely,’ I replied. ‘But I must first consult my sister. If she has no reason

for hastening on to Japan, I shall be only too glad to accept your hospitable invitation.'

'We must place the matter before Lady Olivia, then, and see what she says.'

Accordingly that evening at dinner our guest introduced the subject, and when Olivia had given her consent, it was definitely settled that we should accept the invitation extended to us. For my own part, I must confess, I was glad. I will own to a vulgar curiosity. I wanted to examine his country carefully, to criticise his rule, and I was also anxious to learn what untoward event had called him so suddenly from Europe. Such a favorable opportunity might never occur again, and under these circumstances I was resolved to make the most of it.

Two days later we reached Singapore, spent a miserable day coaling in the harbor, and continued our voyage the same evening. Once in the Gulf of Siam, we were nearly at our journey's end. In three days or thereabouts we should be in the Medang River, which the king had informed us was navigable up to his capital; and then for a spell ashore!

As the distance that separated us from the land decreased, the king's anxiety became almost painful to watch. Throughout the day he paced the deck, casting anxious glances ahead and astern, as if by so doing he could hasten the progress of the boat.

On the evening prior to our making the land, while I was engaged upon the bridge, he discovered Olivia standing at the taffrail, watching the water creaming in the wake. The night was warm, and the sea was strangely phosphorescent.

'In forty-eight hours or thereabouts you will be in your own country once more,' said my sister, when they had been standing side by side for some few minutes.

'Yes, I shall be at the head of my kingdom again,' he answered, in a low voice; 'and from what I imagine, it will be about time. It is a good thing, Lady Olivia, that few people are compelled by fate to know the suspense that has been my portion these five weeks past. And it also falls to the lot of but few to have such good friends as yourself and your brother. How I shall ever be able to thank you both sufficiently for all your goodness to me I do not know.'

'I'm sure we have equal cause to be grateful to your highness.'

To this he offered no reply, but glanced round the horizon, and then up to the multitudinous stars shining in the firmament of heaven.

'Shakespeare tells us "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune,"' he continued; 'but he says nothing of how

we are to guard it when advantage has been taken of the flood, and the fortune has been acquired. My kingdom is my fortune. I have won it; am I to keep it or not? That is the question that the next few weeks have to answer.'

'Keep it?' cried Olivia with conviction. 'As I said to you in Venice, you must keep it, come what may.'

'You wish me success, do you not?'

'With all my heart I do,' she answered; 'you must not even think of failure. It could never be.'

'You have said you wish me success with all your heart, Lady Olivia,' he said, with peculiar emphasis; 'have you any notion of what construction those apparently simple words may have put upon them by a lonely man?'

She gave a little start, and her hand suddenly clenched upon the rail before her; she did not answer, however.

'You must remember,' he said very slowly, and with increasing earnestness, 'that after all, sovereigns are men first and kings afterwards. To win your esteem I would accomplish anything possible to mortal man; nothing could be too difficult for me. But I am frightening you. I had no right to do so. Forgive me; I will say no more now, but will content myself with one question. Having said

so much, can you still bid me go on and prosper with all your heart?"

She looked up into his face, and then in a voice so soft that he could scarcely hear it, whispered:

'I do. Go on and prosper.'

He bent his head over the hand he held, and pressed his lips upon it. She did not try to prevent him; but, as soon as he released her, she turned on her heel and sped away along the deck towards the saloon companion-ladder. When she came to bid me good-night half an hour later, her eyes were red as if with weeping.

'Why, Olivia,' I said, holding her beautiful face up to the light that I might examine it, 'what does this mean? You have been crying. Come, come, darling, what has made you unhappy?'

'I cannot tell,' she answered, her face now buried on my shoulder. 'I do not know.'

Seeing that she was in a state when it is not wise for a man to make any attempt at comfort, I changed my tactics, bade her not be silly, and having done so, led her to her cabin. Afterwards I went on deck, more puzzled as to the reason of her tears than I cared to own.

I found the king pacing up and down before the smoking-room. To my surprise, I found he was in



happier and more confident spirits than I had seen him since we left Venice.

‘We are making the best of headway,’ he cried, as I came up with him. ‘I should say we’re doing a full sixteen.’

‘I can tell you exactly,’ I answered, going to the ladder that led to the bridge, and calling the mate to me. From him I inquired our speed, and was surprised to hear him reply ‘sixteen and a half.’

‘That being so,’ said the king, ‘we should have the coast in sight at daylight, and twenty-four hours later should see us at our destination, after that I can get to work. I feel as if we are on the threshold of great events.’

‘You seem somewhat more confident this evening.’

He looked at me very closely for a second or two, and then, gathering from my face that I knew nothing of his interview with Olivia, continued:

‘I am more confident. As I approach my country my old spirit is coming back to me. I am determined that my arrival shall mark a new epoch. What I have done in the past shall be as nothing to what I will do in the future. I will let you see of what great deeds I and my people are capable, and then you will be able to judge for yourself what our future is destined to be. Lord Instow, who can say that I am not building up the nucleus of what

may some day be the ruling power of the East? You think of India, of Russia, of China, of Japan, and you smile incredulously. You deem it impossible, but I am not abashed; to-night I am prophetic and can see clearly into the future. I see my people increased to more than double their present number; I see the soil of my country utilised to the best advantage; I see my cities filled with honest traders, my borders extended to the China Sea on one side and the Bay of Bengal on the other; I see ships carrying the produce of my land to the other great nations of the world, and the vessels of those countries at anchor in my harbors. Trains traverse my plains, all the latest aids to civilisation are known and utilised by my people, I live at peace with my neighbors, and having done my life's work I see my son ready to take my place when I shall step down from the throne.'

'God grant it may be as your highness predicts,' I answered, quite carried away by the eloquence with which he spoke.

'God grant it may,' he answered, lifting his hat from his head as he spoke.

Then taking my arm, we began to pace the deck together, building up and perfecting the empire which he had so sanguinely anticipated. It was a lovely night, and as the king was not tired, we con-

tinued to walk and talk long after the bell had struck midnight; then, as the dew was falling heavily, we adjourned to the smoking-room, and continued our discussion there. When we had finished, I discovered, to my astonishment, that it was on the stroke of three. In an hour and a half at most it would be daylight, and soon after that the coast should be in sight. Under these circumstances, we determined to remain upon deck to welcome it.

An hour later it was light enough to enable us to see the yacht from stem to stern. We accordingly left the smoking-room and ascended to the bridge. Here the air struck strangely cold, and a slight mist hung upon the water. I inquired our speed from the skipper, who had just joined us, and he answered, 'Barely ten.'

In less than an hour the sun rose on our starboard bow, and when he was well above the sea a faint line revealed to us the land ahead. From contemplating it I turned to the king. His eyes were fixed upon it, and his mouth was firm set as if he were clenching his teeth that he might prevent himself from betraying his emotion. Proportionately as the land rose above the waves his excitement increased, until, when it was close enough for us to be able to discern its general outline, he could contain himself no longer, but putting out his hand, squeezed mine

in it, and muttering something I could not catch, vanished below. A quarter of an hour later I followed his example, and turned into my bunk to sleep like a top till breakfast time.

When we visited the deck again, we were close in shore, approaching, under easy steam, the entrance to a large river whose broad mouth emptied itself into the sea between two lines of thickly wooded cliffs. Evidently this was the Medang River of which his highness had so often spoken to us. Olivia was by my side, pale and heavy-eyed, as if she had not slept a wink all night, which I afterwards discovered had been the case. The king joined us a few moments later, and, standing at my elbow, watched the scene with straining eyes. And indeed the picture presented to us then was one that might have appealed to the most blase of travellers. You must picture for yourself a cloud-capped mountain range, the foremost peaks of which rose almost precipitously from a green jungle that stretched well nigh to the water's edge. Indeed, though I looked for it, beach I could see none. Straight before us, without bar or other hindrance, lay the dark sluggish waters of the Medang River, out of which the palm-clad hills rose abruptly to a height on the right of six hundred feet, on the left to possibly a thousand. With the strip of green sea before us, and the

lights and shadows thrown by the clouds upon the hills ashore, we were presented with such a view as I doubt any one who saw it that day will ever forget.

It was evident that the captain had made himself thoroughly conversant with the locality, for he steamed boldly in, keeping as far as possible in the centre of the stream, in order to avoid snags and dangers of a similar nature. Clustered on a plateau at the foot of the eastern hill were a few small huts, otherwise the landscape was devoid of human dwellings. Indeed, the king informed us that with the exception of a small town situated fifty miles or so inland, there was no settlement of any importance between the sea and the capital.

For the remainder of the day we steamed slowly on, the view changing with each succeeding hour. At one time we were making our way through the virgin forest, as yet well-nigh innocent of the tread of a white man; at others we were passing between high cliffs that stretched up and up, till one had to crane one's neck to see the palm trees growing on the top of them; then the landscape would undergo a change, the timber would grow less dense, and large tracts of plain would present themselves to the eye. Taken altogether, the day's steam afforded us an excellent opportunity of observing the quality of the country; and when I saw it I felt compelled

to admit that, as far as its natural advantages were concerned, one of the king's prophecies looked as if it might very well be fulfilled.

Towards four in the afternoon, the stream grew somewhat narrower, and the country ashore a degree more hilly. Occasionally it became necessary for us to use considerable caution in proceeding, for the current was treacherously strong, and in places large rocks bared their teeth at us from either bank. For at least the sixth time during the day's journey we found ourselves approaching a rocky defile, the advantage of which in case of war the king was quick to point out to me. In fact, in this particular instance, on emerging from the canon, if I may so call it, we discovered ourselves face to face with a substantial fort, erected on a slight eminence and commanding the whole stretch of water. On a flagstaff above it floated the royal standard of the Medangs, a gorgeous piece of coloring that I had never seen before. As we observed it I stole a glance at the king's face. As long as I live I shall never forget the look of pride and affection that had settled upon it. No parent watching the face of its first-born child could have equalled it.

Suddenly a flash of flame and a cloud of smoke broke from the battlements, and almost simultaneously the thunder of a gun greeted our ears, and

echoed among the hills. It was followed by another, and still another, until a complete royal salute had been fired. It was plain that the fort had recognised the presence of the king on the bridge of the yacht, and had been quick to welcome him. Had we possessed a flag similar to that upon the fort, I should have run it up out of compliment to our royal guest; but as we had not got one, we contented ourselves with the Union Jack. At the king's desire the yacht was stopped, in order that the commandant of the fort and his officers might be permitted to embark and pay their respects. To my surprise, they proved to be, without exception, natives of the country; manly fellows, with bright, intelligent faces, and a confident air about them that was very pleasant to see. They were dressed in full uniform, not unlike that worn by our own garrison artillery in India, and, from their appearance, should have made excellent soldiers. While we were waiting their coming their sovereign went below; but as the boat which conveyed them from the fort drew up to the accommodation ladder, he reappeared on deck, clad in full uniform, a helmet with plumes upon his head, and wearing the order of Marie I. upon his breast. Much as I had always admired him, when I glanced at him now I experienced a thrill greater than I had ever yet felt. Such a

truly kingly figure I had never seen in my life before, and I say that as one who in his life has had a fair experience of monarchs.

When the officers had in turn paid their respects, the king inquired if his arrival had been expected, and in reply was informed that not only was it already known in the capital, but that preparations were being made there to receive them. Either he did not deem it politic to ask for information regarding the state of affairs in the country, or he imagined, as was more probable, that the occupants of such an isolated fort would be scarcely likely to be well informed on such a subject; at any rate I noticed that he put no questions to the soldiers. When they had left the ship we got under weigh again, the Union Jack still flying in its place at the gaff end.

‘In six hours from now,’ said the king, as the screw once more began to revolve, ‘our journey will be accomplished, and we shall be at my capital. My friends, I cannot express to you my gratitude for all you have done for me. Believe me, I will never forget it. As I have said so many times before, if ever the chance should occur, you will not find Marie ungrateful.’

He held out his hand and I took it. At that moment I believed that Marie L. would have given me



anything, even to the half of his kingdom. God bless him for a brave and generous-hearted man!

Fortunately it was the night of full moon, and for this reason our progress was not delayed. Had it been otherwise, it would have been necessary for us to remain stationary until daylight, a proceeding which would have consorted ill with the king's impatience to get to his journey's end. By nine o'clock we were within eight miles of our destination, and were already able to distinguish signs of cultivation on the banks, with here and there clusters of habitations. At the king's suggestion, Olivia and I descended to our cabins and donned riding attire. Having done so, we rejoined him on the bridge.

At half-past nine we could see ahead of us the myriad lights of the city, and by this time the stream was crowded with canoes, each of which carried a lantern, and many some peculiar kind of musical instrument, the like of which I have never heard before. The din thus created may be better imagined than described.

Suddenly, from the summit of a hill lying beyond and above the city, there flashed out a jet of fire. A moment later the thunder of a large gun greeted our ears. Once more the royal salute welcomed us, and this time we returned the compliment with our one brass piece forward. The excitement was intense,

and I could see that the king, who stood in the full light of one of the lanterns I had caused to be hung round the back of the bridge, was almost overcome by it. His pale, sensitive face quivered with emotion as he bowed his head repeatedly in acknowledgment of the greetings of his people in the boats on either hand.

Having arrived exactly opposite the town—the white buildings of which presented a picturesque effect in the moonlight—we brought up beside a wharf, upon which hundreds of persons, so it seemed, were crowded. The majority of these carried torches in their hands; while from the citadel on the hill, overlooking the town, the welcome of the artillery still crashed forth. It was a moment when any monarch might have felt his heart swell with pride within him; and Marie was as proud, if not prouder, of his country than most that I have met.

As soon as we were safely-alongside the wharf, a gangway was run out. Upon this a carpet was spread, and over it came a number of richly-uniformed officials, the foremost of whom, I rightly conjectured, was the prime-minister who had dispatched the telegram I had seen in Venice. He was a fine-looking old fellow, a pure-blooded native, and carried himself with a dignity I have seldom seen equalled. His pleasure at having his master back

again could not have been exaggerated, and it did one's heart good to observe the cordial way in which his greeting was reciprocated. One by one the officials came forward and made their obeisances, and when that ceremony was finished a move was made to the street above, where a square space had been roped in and prepared for the reception of the sovereign. All round this stood the populace, with torches, to the number of many hundreds, while the street leading from the wharf, a path through the centre of which was kept by military, must have contained many thousands more.

Reaching the reserve space just mentioned, the king bowed his acknowledgments of the vociferous greetings of the populace, and then, preceded by his chamberlains and other officials, and accompanied by Olivia and myself, made his way towards the spot where a group of horses were standing. Two of these, each of which was a noble animal, reminding me more of a well-bred Arab than any other breed, were jet black; the third, which was more elaborately upholstered than his companions, was as white as snow. As one of the former carried a lady's saddle, I gathered that the blacks were for our use, the white being intended for the king. This proved to be the case.

At the king's invitation we mounted, and, pre-

ceded by trumpeters, and accompanied by a host of officials, all more or less gorgeously attired, made our way up the street towards the citadel—the troops, meanwhile, presenting arms, and the populace waving their torches and cheering with all the strength of their lungs. The effects were peculiar in the extreme, and I wish you could have seen them with me. Even after this lapse of time, I can plainly recall the reflections of the dancing torch flames on the white houses—the sea of faces in the street and upon the roof-tops—and the king riding a few steps before us on his beautiful steed, his helmet in his hand, bowing his acknowledgments of the enthusiastic welcome he was receiving.

At the end of the long central street which, as I have already said, led from the river to the citadel, we arrived at the foot of a steep hill; this we commenced to ascend. On reaching the top we found ourselves confronted by a pair of enormous gates, let into a wall forty feet high if an inch, which was built right out on the face of a precipitous cliff, something like three hundred feet from top to bottom. Indeed, the path up to the gates was the only possible approach to the castle, and even that might have been held by fifty swordsmen against an attacking force of quite a thousand. Above our heads the cannon were still thundering their greeting,

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while at the gate a guard of honor was drawn up to receive us.

Behind the king we rode through the great entrance into the citadel itself. Here the scene was extraordinary in its weird picturesqueness. Occupying all the southern side of the enormous courtyard was the king's palace—a noble building, covering a large area of ground, but of a style of architecture which I could not locate. To afford you some idea of the appearance the palace presented, I might say that it was not unlike the rock castle of Trichinopoli, though scarcely so high or so massive. Unlike that massive fortress, however, it was white as curds, was covered with sculpture from end to end, and boasted a long flight of steps leading up from the yard to the main entrance. Opposite the palace were the barracks and the arsenal; a fine old temple occupied the space midway between, with the stables behind that again. It was not until the day following that I learned the history of this extraordinary palace. Originally it had been a Buddhist monastery of a peculiar design, but was fast falling to decay when the grandfather of the previous ruler of the country, the sovereign from whom Marie inherited, took it into his head to transform it into a palace. Living on none too good terms with his people, he had heightened the walls ten feet,

replaced the old insecure gates with new ones that would have required a battering-ram of enormous power, or a large charge of dynamite, to break them down, and had transformed the quarters of the priests into an enormous palace. His successors had further improved it, as had his heir. The present ruler had carried on the work, added the battery and the arsenal, and the picturesque pile we had before us when we entered the courtyard was the result.

On reaching the palace His Majesty descended from his saddle, and then assisted Olivia to alight. When she had done so, he escorted us up the steps into the Great Hall, where all the officers of his household were grouped, waiting to receive him. The hall, once the refectory of Buddhist priests, was a fine one in every way, rafted with teak, and boasting a polished floor of the same impenetrable wood. At the farther end was a dais covered with a red carpet, upon which stood an ivory throne, elegantly carved with the figures of bulls and elephants, and approached by three ivory steps.

When he had ascended the steps and taken his place under the canopy, a speech of welcome was made by the prime-minister. His Majesty returned thanks with his customary eloquence, and brought the ceremony to a conclusion by bowing to his court.

Then, inviting us to follow, he led the way from the Great Hall across a tessellated courtyard, in which a marble fountain played in the moonlight, to a suite of rooms on the other side. In the first of these he paused, and, turning to us, said:

‘I am now about to introduce you to a person of whom I have never hitherto spoken to you—my sister.’

‘Your sister?’ we both cried in astonishment, for, up to that moment, we had never dreamed that he possessed a relation in the world.

‘Yes, my sister,’ he answered, ‘the Princess Natalie. Poor child, she leads a lonely life shut up in this great fortress; but I think you will like her, Lady Olivia; she is gentleness and sweetness itself.’

‘But does she live here altogether; does she never go out?’ asked Olivia, who, like myself, was growing more and more mystified.

‘Never,’ replied His Majesty; ‘my sister is blind.’

As he spoke, a door at the farther end of the apartment opened, and a white hand divided the curtains that half concealed it. A moment later a young girl entered the room, and, without hesitation, walked towards where we stood. When I saw her I gave a little start of astonishment. You know, Forsyth, that I can scarcely be considered a lady’s man; still, I have seen some pretty faces in my time.

Yet I confess to you that, up to that moment, I had never beheld so beautiful and yet so frail a creature as stood before me then. Olivia is an acknowledged beauty; but to my mind she could not compare at all with the girl who now stood before us for true feminine loveliness. It was a face of the purest Greek type, surmounted by a wealth of golden hair, the latter so fine and silky that it seemed as if to touch it with the softest brush would be to spoil it for ever. She was dressed completely in white, in a mixture of styles, half Oriental, half European, that was very attractive. Though her eyes were open, her affliction could be easily detected by the carriage of her head.

‘So you have come back to me, Marie,’ she said in French, stretching out her hands before her as she spoke. ‘You have been so long away.’

‘Yes, dear, I have come back to you at last,’ replied the king, taking her hand with a tenderness infinitely touching, and drawing her to him that he might kiss her forehead. ‘And what is more, my sister, I have brought some friends with me who have been very kind to me, and whom I know you will thank. They will help me to cheer your loneliness. Let me present you to Lady Olivia Wokingham.’

‘Ah, madame,’ said the girl, turning without hes-



itation to where Olivia stood, 'it is kind of you to help my brother, and still kinder of you to come here. Marie knows how gladly I welcome all his friends.'

Then, when in my turn I had been introduced, she held out her little hand to me, and bade me welcome too.

I am weak enough to own, if it is a confession of weakness, which I do not admit, that when I went to bed that night it was not of the king, his castle, or his popularity I dreamt, but of his sister, the blind Princess Natalie.

## CHAPTER V.

## LIFE IN THE MEDANGS.

It was a strange experience that waking next morning in the bedroom of the king's palace. At first I imagined myself back in Venice; but the shape of the room, the walls, the ceiling, and the furniture very soon undeceived me. They were all of a different stamp from any I had met before. After the first confused wonderment had passed away, I sprang from my bed and ran to the window. It overlooked the great courtyard, in which I discovered a company of infantry drilling under a European officer. They were a smart body of men, not unlike our own Goorkhas in appearance, and looked as if, in the event of trouble, they would be able and willing to give an equally good account of themselves. I watched them with considerable interest for upwards of half-an-hour, and then, having taken a bath in an enormous earthenware bowl which I discovered in a curtained alcove, dressed myself and went out into the courtyard we had seen on the pre-

vious evening. As far as human beings were concerned, I had it to myself. The fountain in the centre played its tinkling music to the rustling accompaniment of the palm leaves as I sat in the colonnade that surrounded it, and, as if to convince me that I was really in the romantic East, half a dozen small monkeys chattered in the trees and a gigantic peacock preened himself upon the farther wall.

A native servant presently appeared carrying a tray upon which were several cups of coffee and plates containing fruit. I helped myself, and sat down to enjoy it. I had hardly commenced, however, before the king appeared from the opposite side, and on seeing me hurried round the fountain to greet me.

'I trust you have slept well in your new quarters, my lord,' he said, as we shook hands.

'Splendidly,' I answered. 'I did not wake once. Since I got up I have been sitting here trying to convince myself that it is all real, and not some dream from which I shall presently awake.'

'It is very real indeed,' he replied with a laugh. 'If you had been up, as I have, ever since daylight, looking through papers and transacting business with my ministers, I venture to believe you would not find much reason to doubt it.'

'I trust you have discovered that things are

scarcely as bad as you were led to believe in Venice?" I said, still wondering what it could have been that had made him come home in so much haste.

'I fear I can scarcely say with truth that I have,' he replied. 'There seems to be an easiness in certain quarters that is cheering, but in others the clouds look black in the extreme. I fear they must of necessity burst of their own weight ere long. I have been informed this morning that the French are pushing up their troops towards my frontier. Before long they will cross it, and then the trouble will commence. Well, let them come, they will not find me unprepared.'

'Can nothing be done?' I inquired. 'Would not a diplomatic remonstrance be of any avail? Surely in that case the troops would either have to withdraw or show reasonable cause for their presence there.'

'Unfortunately they have discovered their excuse already,' he answered. 'It was that very incident which occasioned the telegram you saw. From what I have been told this morning, it would appear that a party of French soldiers, while pursuing a prisoner who had escaped from their ranks, crossed the boundary of the respective countries, and entered a strip of land which I claim as mine, but over which the French government has begun of late to

assert its right of ownership. The commanding officer of one of my forts, seeing the soldiers where he considered they had no right to be, remonstrated with them, and was told, in point of fact, to mind his own business. He thereupon warned them that any farther advance would be regarded as an act of hostility. Upon their disregarding him, he fired upon them, killing six and wounding three others. On the strength of this catastrophe, France has demanded from me the strip of country in question, an indemnity of a million francs, and the life of the officer who gave the command to fire. Naturally my ministers declined to entertain such a monstrous proposal for a moment, and when you know that, you have the situation placed clearly before you.'

'And what is your own feeling in the matter?' I inquired. 'Are you prepared to resist by force of arms in case it should become necessary?'

'I am prepared for anything rather than to allow myself to be deprived of what is undoubtedly my own lawful property,' he answered. 'I have however to remember that a war just now will throw back my young country for years. But better war than injustice. If France gets this she will want more, and then the life-blood will be slowly but surely drained out of me. But do not let us talk any more about it just now. I am sick to death of the

subject. Would you care to accompany me to the battlements and see the view?"

'Nothing would give me greater pleasure,' I answered, as I rose to follow him.

Leaving the courtyard behind us, we passed along a corridor and then up a flight of massive stone steps which eventually brought us out on to the battlements. I only wish, my dear Forsyth, that I could give you some notion of the scene that was then presented to my astonished gaze. The rock upon which the citadel was built rose, as I have already said, directly from the plain to a height of something like three hundred feet. At its foot lay the city spread out like a white pocket-handkerchief. From where we stood we were permitted an uninterrupted view for nearly thirty miles—away to the Mountains of the Wind, as they were picturesquely termed by the natives—before us, and as far as the Hills of Perabundi behind. On our right the jungle commenced and stretched as far as the eye could reach; while on our left the Medang River twisted and twined like a silver snake till it lost itself in the mists of the far west. In midstream, opposite the wharf where we had disembarked the previous night, lay my yacht, looking scarcely bigger than a cockleshell, the Union Jack still floating at the gaff end.

'Is it not a country of which any sovereign might

be proud?" asked the king, who had seated himself on the battlements, whence he watched my admiration. And to think that I came here with but one companion, won it for myself, and now am being threatened with the loss of it again.'

Not knowing quite what to say in answer, I prudently held my tongue, and presently he arose and we continued our walk around the wall. The size and strength of the place amazed me. As far as I could gather, not being a military man trained to find defects in defences, it was well-nigh, if not quite, impregnable. The only weak part about it to my mind was the gate; but even there the path was so narrow that it would have been impossible for an enemy to concentrate a sufficient force upon it so as to make much of an attack upon the woodwork. In order, however, that that might be further protected, a peculiar-shaped gallery had been constructed above it whence a steady fire could be kept up upon the assailants without any chance of injury to those besieged.

After we had perambulated and explored the entire walls to our satisfaction, we returned to the Fountain Courtyard by the way we had come. Here we discovered the Princess Natalie and Olivia seated waiting for us. As we entered both rose. I noticed that the blind girl, when she spoke to us

and before she had heard either of us speak, turned her face to the person she addressed on each occasion without making a mistake. Indeed I very soon discovered that this was one of her many peculiar gifts. So acute and delicate was her hearing that she could discriminate among a hundred footfalls and never be in error.

While we were talking, a sweet-toned Burmese gong sounded for breakfast, and, Olivia accompanying the king, I following with his sister, we made our way to the sovereign's private dining-hall. It was a pretty room, furnished in the European fashion, and overlooked the great square before the Temple. In compliment to us, I suppose, the meal was served à l'Anglais, though wines and various eastern and continental dishes were placed upon the table for those who cared to partake of them. The servants were all natives, wearing the royal badge upon their turbans. It was clear that they had been excellently schooled in their duties, for they were quick, attentive, and, above all, noiseless.

When the meal was finished we were conducted by the Princess to her own boudoir, which was another elegant apartment, leading off the Fountain Courtyard before mentioned. Like the other rooms, it was **also** furnished in the European fashion; the walls were panelled and decorated in a most artistic



style; a grand piano stood in one corner and a harp in another.

‘Natalie,’ said the king, as we seated ourselves, ‘it would be a pretty welcome to your boudoir if you would sing to us.’

The young girl rose immediately and went over to the latter instrument. Then seating herself, she tilted it towards her, and placing her delicate fingers upon the strings, began an accompaniment. It was a song of Schubert’s that she sang, one of those tiny scraps of melody of which one never seems to tire. In this instance I could have listened for hours. Her voice was by no means a powerful one, but its charm lay in its marvellous expression. The recollection of that song has lingered in my brain for three years, and never till my ears are closed by death shall I forget its haunting sweetness.

When she had finished, my royal host invited me to witness a parade of the troops of the garrison. We accordingly excused ourselves and left the ladies to their own devices, while we proceeded to the large courtyard before the palace, where the garrison of the citadel was already drawn up under the command of the governor.

As a just critic, I must admit that the manoeuvres were commendably executed, though with scarcely that spontaneity that one is accustomed to in Euro-

pean troops. However, all things considered, it was a creditable enough exhibition; and for this reason, when the king asked my opinion, I was happily placed in such a position that I could express my approval without being called upon to tell an untruth.

The parade at an end and the troops dismissed, the officer commanding the garrison, a tall dark Frenchman named Gaspard Roche, approached the king. I scanned him closely as he came up the steps, and from that moment took an instinctive dislike to the man. Why I should have done so I cannot tell, but that I did so is beyond doubt; whether or not my aversion was proved to be well founded you will have an opportunity of judging for yourself later on. That he, on his side, did not take very kindly to me was also evident.

Unfortunately this unsympathetic individual was now formally introduced to me, and for this reason it was necessary for me to be civil to him, otherwise I should certainly have declined the honor of his acquaintance. Little did I guess how intimately he was destined to be associated with our fortunes later on. When he had held his conversation with his prince he saluted and withdrew. The king then led me into the palace, where, in his study, he bluntly asked my opinion of his commandant.

'Am I to be candid with you?' I inquired.

'I hope you will be perfectly candid,' he answered. 'I have great faith in your judgment, and I should like to know exactly what you think of him.'

'In that case I have no option but to tell you,' I replied, 'that I don't like the man. There is something about his face that displeases me, though I'm afraid I am illogical enough not to be able to tell you exactly what it is.'

'You surprise me,' said the king gravely. 'The man has been in my service nearly three years now, and I have always found him a faithful servant and a zealous officer. If he has one failing, he is a trifle too severe with his men. Otherwise, I have no fault at all to urge against him.'

'I am very glad indeed to hear it,' I replied. 'You will do me the justice to remember that I only gave you my opinion about the man when you pressed me. I know nothing either for or against him. I simply judged by the effect his face had upon me—a rather foolish method of determining a man's character when all is said and done, I will admit.'

The king was silent for a moment. When he spoke it was as if he had been carefully considering my last speech in all its lights.

'For my part, I am compelled to disagree with your last remark,' he said. 'In nine cases out of ten

the first impression a face makes upon one is the correct one. It is only when one has become accustomed to a countenance that one fails to notice the subtler shades of character reflected upon it. However, you must see more of the general, and perhaps your bad opinion may be dispelled.'

I answered that I hoped that it might, but I did not tell him that no amount of intimacy would ever change my distrust of his officer.

Whether the king had said anything to the man in question I cannot say; but one afternoon a week or so later, I was sitting on the battlements, watching the sunset effects upon the plain below, when I heard footsteps behind me, and on looking round found the person in question coming towards me. As soon as he became aware that I saw him he raised his hand to his helmet and saluted me.

'A lovely evening, my lord,' he said, with soldierly brevity. 'I congratulate you on your taste. It would scarcely be possible to choose a better place from which to observe the glorious sunset effects. Do you mark that long touch of pearl gray upon the hill-top yonder? How beautifully it contrasts with the salmon pink of the sky above!'

I answered in suitable terms, half hoping that he would see I was not anxious for his company and would withdraw again. But it soon became evident

that it was with the intention of seeking me that he had ascended to the wall. He approached and took his seat beside me on the stone coping.

'My lord,' he said, after a few polite commonplaces that deceived neither of us, 'I have a question that I should very much like permission to put to you.'

'What is it?' I asked abruptly, with a sort of uneasy conviction that I knew what his question would be. 'If you will ask it, I will do my best to answer.'

He paused for a moment as if to consider in what manner he could best put it, and having made up his mind said:

'What I wish to know is why your lordship has taken such a prejudice against me?'

Though I half expected that that was what he was going to say, I was so staggered by the way in which he put it that for a moment I could only sit and stare at him.

'I trust, General Roche, I have never given you cause to think I have a prejudice against you?' was all that I could say.

'Perhaps not in your speech, nor in your behavior,' he answered. 'I am prepared to say that both have been courtesy itself. Nevertheless, I am convinced, in my own mind, that you have taken a dislike to me. Can you deny it?'

'My dear sir,' I replied, 'I must let you know that

I object to being cross-examined in this way. I hold myself responsible to nobody for what I may say or think. And surely, whatever may be my feelings towards you, this action on your part will scarcely better them. I don't think you will ever have reason to complain of my behavior; pray, do not give me cause to complain of yours.'

'I suppose I must be content with that,' he said. 'But I should like to have understood why your lordship bears me such ill-will.'

'There you are quite mistaken,' I answered. 'I do not entertain the slightest ill-will towards you. It quite depends upon yourself whether I ever shall.'

'And I am to rest tranquil with this meagre assurance?' he asked.

I rose to my feet, as if to terminate the interview.

'General Roche,' I said sternly, 'you adopt a tone with me that I do not like. I have assured you that I have no animus against you. You imply that you doubt the truth of my assertion. After that, I leave you.'

In his turn he leapt to his feet.

'Mon Dieu,' he cried, 'you treat me like a child.'

'Is that my fault if you behave like one?' I replied. 'But I cannot stay to discuss the matter any further. I have the honor to wish you a good evening.'

I raised my hat and walked away, leaving him

standing looking after me, the picture of impotent rage. From that day forward, however, I was not again molested by him. He went his way, I went mine, and as we met but seldom, our quarrel bade fair, if let alone, to die a natural death.

The week following we made an excursion up the Medang River; the next we visited the ruins of a prehistoric city, fifty miles or thereabouts to the southward. In this fashion the first month of our stay in the Medangs went by. A pleasanter time could scarcely be desired. Dutiless though I was, my days hardly contained an idle moment. The mornings I usually spent with the king, either riding about the country, inspecting troops, visiting forts or works in course of construction, consulting upon others about to be commenced, or in a hundred ways endeavoring to make myself useful to my host. During the great heat of the day I read or painted in the Fountain Courtyard, conversed with the Princess Natalie and my sister; while the evenings were occupied, when there were no official receptions, either with music in the Princess's drawing-room or smoking in the cool upon the battlements above. The life interested me immensely. It was small wonder, therefore, that at the end of the first month I gladly accepted the king's pressing invitation to prolong my stay. Nor did Olivia seem any

more anxious than I was to bid the Medangs farewell. It was easy to see that she had taken a decided liking to the blind Princess, for which I was glad, as also, I could tell, was the king.

By this time, as may be supposed, I had come to understand a good deal of the politics of the infant kingdom, and had seen more than a little of the methods by which our late fellow-traveller governed his subjects. That he had succeeded in his attempt to gain their esteem was self-evident; indeed, it would have been a difficult matter to have found a more popular ruler. At the same time, he was severe in his dealings with evil-doers, and any attempt to prevent or divert the due course of justice was certain to meet with condign punishment. By reason of his beneficent rule, trade was flourishing in every direction; those merchants who under the previous monarch had been driven, by extortion and robbery, into leaving the country were gradually returning to it, and taking up their former businesses; while others, having heard of the security in which their fellows dwelt, were fast entering the country and settling down in it.

Strange to relate, the king, once back in his own dominions, seemed to be quite himself again. He ate better, looked better, and found himself able to bear more fatigue without suffering so acutely after-



wards than he had done for months past. What had brought about this hopeful state of things it was impossible to say, but that there was a decided improvement in his condition no one could deny.

At the end of the second month, and by the exercise of the most careful diplomacy, the French incident seemed to have been lulled to sleep. A greater feeling of security was noticeable along the borders than had been the case for years past. It looked as if the king's return had acted like oil upon the troubled waters, so quickly had the waves of discord settled down into the calm of peace. Still, month after month went by, and each one found us remaining in the kingdom. Once or twice I had hinted that it was almost time we brought our visit to a close, but on each occasion our host, assisted by the Princess Natalie, had pressed us to remain. At last, when we had been six months his guests, I felt compelled to put a definite period to our stay; and after a consultation with Olivia, I accordingly informed our host and hostess that in a week's time we should be obliged to leave them, and to proceed upon our journey.

The evening that I arrived at this decision was a hot one, and after dinner the Princess suggested that we should betake ourselves to the roof of the palace. Accordingly we ascended thither, and set-

tled ourselves down to enjoy the cool breezes that came up to us from the plain. The king, I noticed, was very silent, as was his sister, the bulk of the conversation falling upon Olivia and myself.

The night was truly magnificent, such an one as only those favored latitudes can produce. From the roof of the palace we looked down upon the plain and the native city nestling at the foot of the giant crag; the latter was dotted with innumerable lights. Away beyond the mountain range to the eastward a faint glow betokened the rising of the moon. The only sound to be heard was the barking of a dog far away and the voice of a man singing in the courtyard of the barracks. After we had been sitting for some time talking of Venice and a dozen different things, Olivia rose and went forward to the parapet, where she stood with her hands resting on the coping, looking down into the abyss. Presently the king rose and followed her. They stood side by side for some moments, and then strolled together along the battlements. During the time they were absent I remained where I was, talking to the Princess. I cannot hope to make you understand how sweet and fragile she looked in her white dress. The moonlight sparkled upon her rings, and the perfume of her laces came distinctly to me, though I sat some feet away.

‘And so it is your intention to leave us in a week, Lord Instow?’ she said, when the footsteps of her brother and his companion had died away. ‘We shall miss you very much.’

‘We shall be equally sorry to go, I can assure you,’ I answered truthfully. ‘We have both enjoyed our stay in the Medangs so much that the place seems like a second home to us.’

‘Marie will miss you terribly, I know,’ she continued. ‘He was only saying so this morning. He owes so much to his talks with you. My life too will be very lonely without your sister. You are proud of her, Lord Instow, and you have good cause to be. If only I could see her face. I know it must be very beautiful.’

‘Yes. Olivia is beautiful,’ I answered. ‘And what is better still, she is a good woman. I am very proud of her, as you say.’

‘She has been very kind to me, and I have no other friends.’

‘I fear you have a very lonely life, Princess,’ I said; ‘but, if I may transpose your own words, you have a brother of whom any sister might be proud.’

‘Dear Marie, I am proud of him,’ she answered softly. ‘But he is too busy to be able to give much of his time to me. He is so wrapt up in his country, he thinks of nothing else. He denies himself no

trouble, he spares himself no pain; in fact, he seems to live for it alone.'

My heart was touched by the loneliness of the blind girl, shut up in this great barrack, without companion of any sort. For the first time, a sense of her real desolation came over me, and I was about to say something to her on the subject when I was interrupted by the return of the other couple. Both seemed unusually quiet; and presently Olivia, with a little shiver, suggested that it was growing cold, and that it would perhaps be better if an adjournment were made to the rooms below. We accordingly rose, and I was about to follow the party down the steps when the king turned, and laying his hand upon my arm detained me.

'My lord,' he said, with unusual gravity, 'I should be glad if you could allow me a few minutes' conversation before we go down-stairs. I have an important communication to make to you.'

'With pleasure,' I answered, but not without a slight feeling of alarm in my heart.

We accordingly walked back to the chairs, and took our former places.

'Lord Instow,' began the king, 'I am a plain man, and I like to say things in a plain way. Therefore, let me tell you at once, that to-night I have asked your sister, Lady Olivia, to be my wife and to share my throne with me. She has consented.'

For a moment, though for several reasons I had expected it, I sat dumbfounded by his news. I could scarcely believe it. It must have been nearly a minute before I recovered my wits sufficiently even to remember that I had offered him no reply.

'I'm afraid your lordship scarcely approves of my action?' said the king, who had evidently been studying my face.

'It's not that,' I blurted out, like a great schoolboy; 'but you have surprised me beyond all measure. I cannot say that I have never contemplated your loving her—for I presume you do love her?'

'God knows,' he answered, 'that I love her better than my own life. To call her mine I would sacrifice everything I hold dear.'

'You will not be asked to do that,' I said. 'But I must have time to consider it. At present I am all in a whirl, and can think of nothing. I must see Olivia too. You say she has accepted you?'

'She has been merciful enough to tell me that she loves me. Heaven alone knows what I have done to deserve so great a boon. My lord, I will simply say that I love your sister with a true and honest love. When I tell you that my father was that French Marquis de Meraut, who was murdered by the Commune, while my mother was the daughter of the Count Guilacci, for many years Italian ambassador

at the Court of St. James, you will see that my birth is equal to your own. Moreover, by my own endeavors, I am the sovereign of a country that has undoubtedly a great future before it. As my queen, I will love your sister, honor her, and protect her. Come what may, she shall always be my first care.'

'You must pardon me,' I said gravely, but not unkindly, 'if I ask you to allow further consideration of the matter to stand over until I have seen my sister. When I have had a talk with her I shall be in a position to tell you whether I can give my consent or not.'

'I am in your hands entirely,' he answered. 'By all means, since you wish it, let us defer consideration of it until such a time as you feel that you can give me the answer your heart dictates.'

'I will promise you an answer to-morrow morning without fail.'

'I thank your lordship. Now perhaps we had better go down-stairs.'

In the Fountain Courtyard below we found the ladies waiting for us. Olivia greeted me with an anxious face, and I could see that she was hoping for an opportunity of speaking to me alone. This she found when we had all bidden each other good-night, and had separated to retire to our various rooms. Following me along the corridor, she caught

me up as I passed through the sitting-room, which, since our arrival, had been set apart for our own private use.

‘Instow,’ she said, standing before me, ‘I want to speak to you.’

I took her hand.

‘I can guess what you are going to say,’ I answered. ‘The king has told me all.’

She looked up into my face, and I noticed that there was a light in her eyes that I had never seen there before—the light of love.

‘You approve, do you not?’ she asked, as if the fate of all the world hung upon my reply.

‘Tell me first, dear, if you love him?’ I said; ‘I can answer you better then.’

A rosy blush suffused her face, and she hung her head a little. ‘I love him as I shall never love another in my life,’ she answered. ‘He fascinated me from the very first, though I would not admit it even to myself. Now I would do anything, dare anything for love of him. Oh! Instow, I love him better than life itself.’

‘But have you considered what it will mean to you?’ I said. ‘Have you thought what a change it will make in your life? You will probably not see England again for years; you will be cut off from home and friends—in a great measure even from

myself. You will miss all the surroundings, and a great many of the luxuries to which you have been accustomed. Are you prepared to sacrifice so much?"

'I love him,' she answered simply; 'and nothing I can do will be a sacrifice. As to the other things you speak of, I shall find an equivalent in helping him in his life's work.'

'But you know his state of health. I do not wish to be unkind, but you must remember that seven months ago the Venetian doctors gave him but two years of life.'

'You are cruel to remind me of that,' she cried. 'But if it is so, the greater reason that I should make his life happy while it lasts.'

'In that case I will say no more. If you love him, and he loves you, and your happiness lies together, Heaven forbid that I should withhold my consent.'

She put her soft arms round my neck and kissed me. Then, before I could prevent her, she had slipped away again, and vanished from the room.

I passed from the sitting-room into my bed-room. But it was not to sleep. Hour after hour I tossed upon my couch, thought succeeding thought, and every one bringing me back to the original question:

'Had I done right in giving my consent?'

Alas, that was a question for which only time could find an answer.



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE WEDDING.

A month had elapsed since Marie proposed to Olivia, and I am now brought to the morning of the wedding-day. From this statement two things will be apparent—firstly, that I had given my consent to the marriage, and secondly, that the king was not desirous of postponing his happiness any longer than was absolutely necessary. What you, my dear Forsyth, will say to yourself when you hear my news I can only conjecture. Doubtless you will think me foolish, more probably you will deem me mad; but I assure you no man could be saner. I gave my dearly loved sister to be the wife of the King of the Medangs with my eyes open, firmly convinced in my own mind that my action would promote the happiness of both parties. Of course I am bound to admit to you that I would rather it had been otherwise—that is to say, I would sooner have seen her united to a man of her own station in England; but since Fate had willed that she should become the bride

of the sovereign of this Eastern state, and her whole happiness was wrapped up in so doing, I was prepared to withdraw my objections and assist as far as possible in bringing about what they both so much desired. And as if to be still further contradictory, I have no hesitation at all in saying that I loved the man as I shall probably never love another. Even had it not been for his extraordinary power of interesting others in himself, his kingly nature, his absolute sincerity, his pluck, and his thoughtfulness for those about him could not have failed to attract one towards him. In my time I have, as you are well aware, met men of all ranks, but never another like Marie I. of the Medangs. Nature had fitted him to be what he was—a King and a Leader of Men.

Having thus explained my motives, though I fear you will scarcely consider them sufficient to justify my act, I am brought to the description of the wedding itself. For two days prior to the happy event the loyal inhabitants of the capital had been keeping holiday. No work save that of decorating the city was done, and from morning till night the streets resounded with the tapping of hammers, the noise of musical instruments, and continual merriment. The people of the Medangs are a mirth-loving race, and they were now being given an opportunity of

giving full vent to their feelings. At the Citadel we were kept in an even greater state of excitement. One after another the Princes of the tributary states arrived, and it was necessary that each should be welcomed with a salvo of artillery according to his rank. The King had next to receive them in audience, after which apartments in the Palace had to be assigned to them and camping-ground allotted to their followers. The rabble and confusion that this occasioned may be better imagined than described. In my life I had never seen anything like it before, and I trust I may never do so again. All the nations of the East seemed to be represented, including Hindoos, Burmese, Malays, Siamese, Chinese, and others whose identity I could not ascertain.

As soon as I was dressed on the wedding-day I left my bedroom and went to the sitting-room adjoining it, where Olivia and I had made a compact the previous evening that we would meet. The King I had not seen since the morning of the day before; but I had heard that he also was busily engaged with his preparations.

When I had been alone in the room for something like half an hour, standing at the window watching the groups of strangers clustered in the courtyard below the Palace steps, and thinking how unlike it all was to the wedding I had been used to picture

for my sister, I heard a light footstep cross the corridor, and next moment the door opened and Olivia entered the room. She looked pale and I guessed that her night had been a sleepless one, as indeed I afterwards discovered it had. I kissed her on the forehead and then led her to a chair.

‘Have you realised that to-day is your wedding-day?’ I said, as I took my place beside her. ‘Are you sure, my sister, that you do not in any way regret the step you are taking?’

‘I shall never regret it as long as I live,’ she answered firmly. ‘I shall always look back on to-day as the happiest day of my life.’

‘God grant it may be,’ I said; and while I spoke, as if in ratification of my words, the cannon of the Citadel thundered forth a royal salute.

Rising, I led her to the window, and showed her the heterogeneous collection encamped in the courtyard below. She regarded them with visible interest, and as she did so I watched her face and noted the expressions that flashed across it. Suddenly I saw her eyes light up and a flush of color overspread her cheeks; and, wondering what might have occasioned it, I followed the direction of her eyes. In the courtyard the large assembly was bowing like one man to the earth, and in the lane which they had formed to allow him to pass was the King. He

had been to service in the Cathedral and was now returning to the Palace accompanied by his chaplain, an ascetic young French priest, whose devotion to the King was proverbial.

There was something about the King's appearance that morning that I seemed never to have noticed before, a nobility that was as indescribable as it was grand. That he looked happy there could be no doubt whatever; on the other hand I could not but think he appeared to have grown somewhat thinner in the last week; his eyes were large and dark, but they seemed to have sunk farther into his head than of old and to have lost something of their fire. He carried himself, however, with all his usual manliness and that strange air of self-reliance which had so much impressed me on the first occasion that I had seen him. When he saw Olivia standing at the window he hastened up the steps, and in less time than it takes to tell had knocked, and entered the room where we stood. Approaching his future wife, he took her hand and bending over it kissed it reverently. Then immediately he turned to me and bade me good morning, at the same time warmly shaking me by the hand. The cannon meanwhile continued their salute from the battlements above, and every moment more and more people were entering the Citadel from the town below.

Thinking he might like a few minutes alone with Olivia, and disregarding our English habit of keeping the bride and bridegroom apart until they meet in the church, I made an excuse, and left them together while I went for a walk upon the roof. It was a perfect morning, and I stood for some minutes beside the coping of the wall, looking down upon the plains below and drinking in the loveliness of the scene spread out before me. All the time my brain was hard at work. It would be idle to say that my thoughts were entirely pleasant ones. I pictured Olivia as I remembered her when my father and mother were alive. I even found myself recalling the games we played together. From that I passed on to her first real admirer, poor James Dacing, who as you know, met his fate at Tel-el-Kebir with such conspicuous heroism. From him I reviewed the numberless other admirers she has had since then, from Belmain, Melbenham, George Dixforth, down to Belgrave, whose fate it was to indirectly bring about the marriage I am now attempting to describe to you.

The ceremony had been fixed for eleven o'clock in the Cathedral in the Citadel, and long before that hour the square before the Palace steps was packed to its utmost holding capacity. From the bottom of the steps to the Cathedral doors, a distance of

upwards of a hundred yards, the path was kept by soldiery. This was carpeted with a thick red native cloth for the better protection of the various dresses of those taking part in the pageant.

Almost exactly on the stroke of the hour appointed, three of the King's trumpeters appeared upon the great steps and blew six blasts upon their instruments. Almost simultaneously three chamberlains appeared from the Palace, carrying wands of office in their hands, and, escorted by the trumpeters, who in their turn were supported by half a dozen royal standard bearers in uniform, they made their way down the steps towards the Cathedral, followed by the officers of the retinues of the visiting Princes according to their respective ranks; after which, behind still more trumpeters, walked the Princes themselves, succeeded by the King's Ministers and the chief officials of his kingdom. The officers of His Majesty's household came after the officials, and then, preceded by more trumpeters, the Sovereign himself, dressed in the uniform of his own Guards, and riding upon a noble milk-white charger, magnificently caparisoned, which was led up in order that he might mount at the steps. On either side walked with drawn swords two of his generals, one of whom was Gaspard Roche, while behind marched a guard of honor of his chief and favorite regiment.

At a short distance came a litter borne by six servants, escorted by footmen in the King's livery. This contained the Princess Natalie. As it moved away two chamberlains approached the spot where I was standing with Olivia, waiting for our turn to come, and informed us that the litter which was to convey the bride-elect was at the foot of the steps, with the horse upon which I was to ride. I accordingly gave my sister my arm and led her down to the place where her conveyance waited for her. It was a truly wonderful affair—as I learned afterwards upwards of two hundred years old, and had been used in the marriage ceremonies of the kings of the Medangs for longer than the oldest inhabitant of the country could remember. In appearance it somewhat resembled a large reclining-chair, save that the arms were sloped outwards in a fashion not unlike the splash-boards of a dogcart; the back curled into a gracious fold. The whole concern was covered with the finest gold-leaf inlaid with lapis lazuli and mother-of-pearl, and studded with innumerable precious stones. Beside it stood twelve stalwart natives dressed in state liveries. Olivia having taken her seat, they lifted the poles upon their shoulders as if they had been feathers, and set off. At the same instant the horse I had ridden on the evening of our arrival was brought up for me. I mounted and took



my place by the side of the litter, and in this fashion we approached the lofty pile where the marriage ceremony was to be performed.

The enthusiasm of the crowd by this time was extraordinary; and when we reached the great door of the sanctuary, where the Chamberlains of the King stood with bared heads waiting to receive the bride, it became almost beyond control. At the best of times I am not a great exponent, as you know, of the art of horsemanship, and on this occasion, so cumbered was I by my uniform and the trappings of my steed, that the King had helped my sister to alight long before I had reached the ground. Then Olivia leaning on my arm, we entered the building, and in a few moments the ceremony had commenced.

Of the service itself I can tell you but little. Looking back on it now it seems to me to cover a very uncertain period in which I was conscious only of a vast concourse of people surrounding me, a wall of gorgeous vestments in front, and with it an overpowering knowledge that when I left the building my sister, my companion for so many years, would be the property of another.

At last, however, it was over, and we passed out of the building to be greeted by the cheers of the excited populace in the square, the blaring of trumpets, and the crashing of the cannon from the battlements.

ments. On the return journey a slight change was made in the arrangement of the procession. The monarch rode beside the litter, while a troop of young girls danced before them and strewed flowers in their path. Arriving at the steps again, the Princes of the tributary states, the great officers of the kingdom, and the members of the household ranged themselves in a semicircle before the Palace doors. His Majesty helped his bride to alight, and then, when I had joined them, led the way to the open space at the top. Here we paused, and the King turned and faced his people. What he saw in their faces must have pleased him, for his countenance lit up, and he showed them the happiest face a man could wear. Then, turning to his chamberlain, he took from a cushion a thin circlet of gold which he held aloft in order that all assembled in the courtyard might see it. Having done this, he placed it upon Olivia's head and thereby crowned her as his Queen. As he did so the trumpeters blew as if they would have burst their cheeks, the troops presented arms, and another royal salute was fired from the battlements. It was a glorious scene; and when His Majesty embraced his Queen such a shout went up as could never before have been heard by the grim old walls. It brought before me the reality of the

change in Olivia's life more than anything that had so far taken place.

When the coronation ceremony was finished, the King left the steps, and, leading his Queen by the hand, proceeded—the Princes making way for him to pass—to the Great Hall of State, where, according to ancient custom, the people had the right of presenting in person their gifts to the Queen and of making obeisance before her. By the time this ceremony was accomplished we were all worn out, though Olivia tried hard not to show it. At last, however, the tail end of the long procession came in sight, and in less than a quarter of an hour it had disappeared through the exit door again. We were free once more, free to be natural, and free to congratulate each other on the happy event in which we had just taken part.

It had been previously arranged that the honeymoon should be spent at one of the King's residences situated in the jungle about twenty miles from the capital. The royal bride and bridegroom were to ride thither, and about two hours after the ceremony just described, when Olivia had rested herself and felt equal to the exertion, it was announced that the horses were at the door and that it was time to be off. All the baggage had been sent on the day previous, and now nothing remained but for us to wish

the happy couple God speed. To this end it was my intention to ride with them as far as the outskirts of the town, and then to return to the Citadel, if possible by another route.

The parting between the King and his sister was affecting in the extreme, and I must confess myself that I was not a little cast down at the thought of bidding Olivia good-bye, even for so short a time. But once we had mounted our horses at the foot of the steps, and had ridden out through the Citadel gates among the crowds of citizens assembled to greet us, our feelings underwent a complete change. It would have been impossible for the most misanthropic of men to have been miserable there, for from the Citadel gates down the steep path and throughout the city the route was lined with thousands of happy faces. No escort accompanied us, the Sovereign feeling sufficiently convinced of the loyalty of his people to venture among them without one. Before us went a company of native musicians and dancing girls, while, behind, the populace closed in upon us in one compact mass. According to the Medang custom, the people were dressed in their brightest colors, with garlands of flowers upon their heads, while the houses were decorated with the green leaves of the palm, the latter being supposed to typify youth, beauty, and perpetual health.

When we reached the centre of the town the crush was found to be so great that it was with the utmost difficulty we could make our way through it. In vain the most influential of the citizens endeavored to force a path for us, the crowd was so tightly packed that it was impossible for those in the middle of the street to move, being penned in by the press from the side lanes and alleys. Still the King smiled and bowed in answer to the greetings of his people; but I noticed that he once or twice looked anxiously at the ever-increasing crowd. As we waited I glanced about me, my horse standing steady as a rock in spite of the crowd surging round his flanks. Close beside me were two little girls decorated from head to foot with flowers; behind them, two old men with venerable gray beards. Then my eyes fell upon an individual to the left of them again. He was tall and spare, and though dressed in the Medang fashion was evidently not an inhabitant of the country, but—so it seemed to me—a European. What it was about him that made me look longer at him than at any other I am sure I cannot say, I only know that I did watch him and, as it turned out, it was well that my attention was so constant, for suddenly I saw his arm go up. In the palm of his hand was balanced a long knife, the blade of which glistened in the sunlight. For a moment I was so fascinated by

what I saw that I remained where I was as if rooted to the spot, unable to move hand or foot, or even to cry out. But as I saw the hand go back, and my eyes lost the glitter of the sun upon the blade, my senses returned to me, and I dashed my spurs into my horse's sides with all the strength of my heels. With a bound that nearly unseated me, he sprang forward a couple of paces, knocking over an old man and woman in so doing. This prompt action on his part brought me between the King's person and that of the man with the knife. As I stopped I threw up my arm, and almost at the same instant felt a sudden stab as if it had been pierced by a red-hot knitting-needle. It was the knife, which had pierced the flesh a little above the elbow. To pluck it out was the work of an instant, but I could not do so before the King and the crowd had become aware of what had happened.

'Seize the man,' shouted the King in a voice that rang like a trumpet-call above the clamor of the crowd. 'On no account let him escape.'

Then, bringing his horse up alongside of mine, he leaned towards me and said anxiously:

'Instow, you are wounded. For Heaven's sake, get off your horse and have it at once attended to.'

'It is only a scratch,' I answered as coolly as I could. 'Thanks to my coat sleeve, its force was brok-

en. But come, now is our opportunity. Let us push forward.'

The King bent from his saddle and said something in a low voice to one of his servants, who made his way out of the rabble and disappeared in the direction of the Citadel as fast as he could go.

By this time the mob had seized the assassin and but for the exertions of the police, who had come up, and of the principal inhabitants, would have torn him in pieces. Seeing that our presence only added to the excitement, we touched our horses with the spur and made our way down a side street in the direction of the river.

Having left the city behind us, we entered a patch of jungle where the King signed to us to pull up. We accordingly did so, and immediately he jumped from his horse and approached me.

'Instow,' he said, looking up at me, 'you have saved my life, and God knows how sincerely I thank you for it. Now let me look at your arm. I must know the exact extent of the harm done to you.'

'It is nothing, I assure your Majesty,' I answered. 'As I told you in the city, owing to the thickness of my coat I have scarcely received a scratch.'

He was not satisfied, however, with this assurance, but made me dismount and remove my coat. When I had done so a nastier stab than I imagined was

revealed. The man must have put out all his strength to have inflicted such a wound. Olivia uttered a little cry as she saw it, but soon recovered her nerve sufficiently to assist the King in binding it up. This done, His Majesty proposed returning with me to the city, but I would not hear of such a thing. I told him I felt quite comfortable and was fully equal to the exertion of riding home alone. At last, but very unwillingly, he consented to this arrangement, and I accordingly mounted and bade them good-bye. Fearing he might repent, I lost no time in making off, and only stopped upon the crest of a hill to wave them a final adieu.



## CHAPTER VII.

## MY SUSPICIONS ARE AROUSED.

On reaching the citadel, half-an-hour after I had bidden the king and Olivia good-bye, I discovered that the assassin had already been conveyed thither, and was about to be brought before the Governor. As soon therefore as I had seen the palace doctor and had had my wound attended to, I walked in the direction of the room where I was informed the inquiry was to take place. On reaching it I found that sentries were placed at the doors to exclude the public, who were still clamorous for the man's death; but my position in the palace was so well understood, and my person so well known, that I expected to have no difficulty in obtaining admission. To my surprise, however, the sentries, acting as they said on the Governor's orders, politely but firmly refused to permit me to pass. They had received instructions, so they informed me, that no one, not even the officials of the citadel, were to be allowed to enter. However, I had made up my mind to be present, so I bade a servant convey my name to the Governor and inform him of my wish.

Presently the man returned and bade me follow him. When I entered the room I discovered the General seated at a desk in the centre, with the prisoner, guarded by soldiers, standing before him. No one else was in the room.

On seeing me, Roche rose and came towards me. I noticed that his face was paler than usual, and that he wore an unaccustomed air of nervousness.

'I regret exceedingly that you should have been refused admittance, my lord,' he began as soon as I had closed the door behind me. 'Had I imagined for an instant that you desired to attend this preliminary inquiry, I should have made a point of adjourning it for your convenience.'

'I beg you will say no more about it,' I answered, not believing for an instant that he spoke the truth. 'Naturally I desired to be present. First, for the reason that I was the person who saw him throw the knife; and secondly, because I was lucky enough to be the one who prevented it from reaching the king.'

'In that case we had better get to business,' he said shortly.

'With all my heart,' I answered; and we accordingly sat down at the table, and the examination at once commenced.

On closer scrutiny the prisoner proved to be a

sinister-looking fellow, lacking one eye, and having his face disfigured by a cut which extended almost from his left eyebrow to his chin. Despite his native dress, I felt even more convinced than before that he was not an Oriental as he pretended, but a European. I noticed, however, that Roche had not been struck by this fact, for he addressed him in the Medang dialect, which it appeared the man spoke only imperfectly.

‘Try him in French,’ I suggested, seeing how slow our progress was likely to be.

The Governor cast a quick glance at me, and as quickly withdrew his eyes again.

‘It is not likely he would understand French,’ he answered. ‘The man is a native, my lord.’

‘I fear I must differ from you on that point,’ I said emphatically in German—which I knew he understood. ‘The man is as much a European as either of us, and of that I am convinced.’

Then turning to the prisoner, I said in French, quite casually, so that if possible I might take him by surprise:

‘Tell me, my man, what countryman you are?’

But to the General’s satisfaction and my extreme discomfiture, the fellow only shook his head, signifying thereby that he did not understand. I thereupon tried him in German, Italian, Spanish, Rus-

sian, and finally English, but to every question he replied with the same shake of the head and peculiar motion of the hands expressive of non-comprehension.

'I'm afraid that after all your lordship must rest content with my assurance,' said Roche with an ill-concealed sneer upon his face. 'The fellow is, as I say, a native, possibly not of the Medangs, but at least of one of the adjoining countries.'

In spite, however, of the rebuff I had received, I was more than ever convinced that he was wilfully deceiving me, but as I had no possible means of proving it, I forbore to say more, and the examination proceeded. But badly as I had succeeded in my cross-questioning, Roche now found himself faring even worse. The man absolutely refused either to give his name, to state his country, the date of his arrival in the Medangs, his reason for attempting to assassinate the king, or to state whether or not he had any accomplices. To every question put to him he stolidly replied in the native 'I do not know,' and no threat of punishment could extort another answer from him. At any other time Roche's discomfiture would have been amusing enough to watch, but under the present circumstances I must own I shared his anger.

'Since he refuses to tell you anything, what is to

be done with him?" I asked after we had been upwards of an hour questioning him.

'I shall lock him up till he does tell,' replied the Governor bluntly. 'A little touch of the rattan would soon make him speak, but unfortunately His Majesty will not permit one to make use of it.'

'And when will you have him brought up again?' I asked.

'To-morrow morning, if that will be convenient to your lordship,' he replied. 'Shall we say eleven o'clock?'

'Eleven o'clock will suit me admirably,' I answered. 'Let us postpone it till then.'

The necessary orders were accordingly given, and the prisoner was marched away by his guards. I remained for a few moments in conversation with the Governor, and then also took my departure.

For some reason or another my suspicion that the prisoner, in spite of his dark skin, and ignorance of any other tongue save the Medang, was not the native he pretended to be haunted me for the remainder of the day. I could not drive it from my mind. And why Roche should have persisted in asserting that he was not a European also puzzled me more than I cared to own. And yet when I came to analyse the evidence and his behavior I could not

find sufficient in it to warrant me in accusing him of complicity with the prisoner.

On my return to the palace the Princess Natalie sent for me, and was quick to express her sorrow at what had occurred. In spite of the doctor's assurance that my hurt was not dangerous, it was some time before I could convince her that I was not mortally wounded.

'I cannot understand it at all,' she said for about the twentieth time. 'Marie is so beloved by his people that I am convinced not one of them would dream of raising his hand against him. The man must surely be a new arrival in the Medangs.'

'That is my own opinion,' I replied; 'but General Roche, who after all has had more experience of them, seems to think otherwise.'

'General Roche invariably thinks differently from any one else,' she answered. 'Sometimes I lose patience with him. Do you know in what part of the citadel this wretched man is confined?'

'Near the gate,' I replied. 'He is to be examined again to-morrow morning.'

'You will be present then, will you not? I shall feel safer if I know that you are to be there.'

As she spoke she laid her little white hand upon my arm, and looked up at me with her poor blind eyes in a manner that would have melted my heart

had I been the most obdurate of men. There was magnetism in her touch, for it thrilled me through and through as I had never been thrilled before.

'I promise you I will be there,' I said. 'I hope that then we will be able to discover who the wretch is, and for what purpose he attempted your brother's life.'

'I thank you,' she said simply, and then bade me good-bye.

After dinner that evening I went for my usual stroll round the battlements. Since darkness had fallen, a greater feeling of loneliness had come over me than I had yet experienced. I missed Olivia, and I also missed the king. They were only to be absent three days, but even that short time seemed an eternity to look forward to. Of late a great restlessness had been my portion; a desire to see something more of the East had taken possession of me. I had always entertained a passion for travel; and now that Olivia's future was provided for, and a fitting opportunity presented itself, I resolved to gratify it. All being well when they returned, I would set off again in my yacht and allow the young couple time to get over the first blush of their affection and to settle down soberly to their married life before I returned to them.

By the time I had arrived at this conclusion, I had

traversed the entire circle of the walls and was back again at the steps beside the gate. It was a lovely night, and as I was not sleepy enough to think of retiring to rest, I sat myself down on the coping and watched the glimmering of the lights upon the plain below. Suddenly my ear caught the sound of voices. Something about them riveted my attention at once. As there was no one on that side of the Gate Tower but myself, it was evident that they must proceed from the cell below where I sat, the grated window of which overlooked the path leading from the city. Instantly I remembered that this was the room in which the man who had attempted the king's life was confined. No sooner did I recollect this than I leaned as far over as I dared and listened. The talkers, whoever they were, were standing at the window, so that I could hear them plainly. One voice was deep and resonant—that belonged to General Roche. The other was more nasal, and was evidently that of the prisoner, who had declared his inability to understand French.

General Roche, or the man I supposed to be he, muttered something, but what it was I could not catch. His companion answered him, and what he said brought me up, as the sailors say, all standing with surprise. It was but a short sentence, consist-



ing, in fact, of only three words, and yet no quarto volume could have been fraught with more significance to me.

‘Mais s’il decouvrait . . ?’ asked the other. Once more I could not catch his companion’s reply.

In that case my suspicions were correct after all, and the man not only understood French but spoke it. But why was Roche with him, and what could it be that the other feared that a third person might discover? Disregarding the old saying that listeners seldom hear good of themselves, I leaned still farther over the wall in an attempt to catch more of their conversation, but to my disappointment they had evidently moved from the window, for though their voices were still audible to me it was impossible to distinguish what they said.

Puzzling over what I had heard, I went down the steps to the palace and sought my own apartments. All night long my suspicions kept me company, and when I arose in the morning I was still endeavoring to arrive at a proper understanding of the situation.

While I was dressing, the king’s physician was announced. He had come to dress my wound, and during the time that he was so occupied I inquired after the prisoner. To my dismay, I was informed that he had escaped during the night.

‘Escaped?’ I cried.

'Escaped, my lord,' replied the doctor.

'But how on earth could he have managed it?' I inquired, scarcely crediting that what he said could be true. 'There must have been gross carelessness somewhere.'

'No one understands it any more than you do, my lord,' the doctor answered. 'The General is furious, and says he will have the sentries' lives for their negligence. But the men both swear that the prisoner did not pass them.'

'Have they examined the window?'

'That I cannot say. Probably they have by this time if they had not done so then.'

'His Majesty will be very angry when he hears it,' I continued. 'I should not like to be in the culprit's shoes.'

'He could not be any more angry than the General,' replied the medico. 'I can assure you it is not safe to go near him to-day.'

Not knowing that the doctor might not be one of Roche's tools, and would carry on to him all I said, I forbore to say anything further on the subject, and accordingly when he had finished his work he left me.

I now found myself confronted with a nice little problem that only seemed to grow more and more insoluble the longer I dwelt upon it. First I had

to discover what connection existed between General Roche and the prisoner. Next I had to find out why the former had tried so hard to keep me out of the court-room; also why he had endeavored to make me believe the man a native, why he had visited him in his cell the previous evening; and last but not least, what it was they both feared some third person might discover. That there was some unpleasant mystery lurking behind it all, and that Roche had connived at the man's escape, I felt as certain as that I had heard them talking on the previous evening. But the reason of it all, as I have said, was a great deal more difficult to see.

After breakfast I was informed that the Governor of the citadel desired permission to speak with me. Upon my consenting to see him, he was ushered into the room forthwith. Pretending that I did not see his outstretched hand, I begged him to be seated, and then inquired in what manner I could be of service to him.

'I fear you will be as angry as myself at my news,' he began abruptly. 'I have come to tell you that our examination this morning must be postponed.'

'Indeed!' I replied with simulated surprise; 'and pray for what reason? Is the prisoner not well?'

'The prisoner has escaped,' he answered, looking me full in the face.

‘Escaped?’ I cried, as if thunderstruck by his news. ‘You don’t mean to tell me that you have allowed that to happen?’

As I put this apparently innocent question I watched his face narrowly; but he was too clever for me. It expressed nothing but what he wished it to do.

‘I have not allowed it,’ he answered hotly, after a momentary pause. ‘But the sentries who did allow it shall feel the weight of my wrath, or my name is not Gaspard Roche.’

‘But if he has escaped, how do you think he managed it?’ I inquired. ‘How could he have got out of his cell?’

‘Through the window,’ he answered. ‘The bars have been tampered with. When the jailer entered the cell this morning they were found lying upon the floor just as the prisoner had left them.’

‘But how came he to have the necessary tools about him?’ I asked. ‘That is a point to be considered. For surely you searched him before you locked him up?’

‘The sergeant of the guard did so in my presence,’ he replied sulkily. ‘I cannot imagine how he obtained possession of them.’

‘Some one must have visited him during the evening,’ I answered, ‘and have given them to him. He

could not have got them in any other way. Is there no one whom you suspect?

Once more I watched his face, and this time I could not help fancying he did not seem quite as comfortable as he had been before. However, he recovered himself almost instantly, and faced me as resolutely as ever.

'If I find that some one, it will be the worse for him,' he rejoined. 'He shall take his place in the cell, that I'll warrant. No man fools Gaspard Roche with impunity.'

'In that case I may trust you to find him,' I said. 'As you are doubtless aware, His Majesty will be very much annoyed at finding him gone.'

'He could not be more annoyed than I am,' the General replied. 'But I'll have the fellow back yet, or I'll know the reason why. He cannot have got very far in the time.'

'Perhaps he is still in the citadel,' I said.

'I have had every hole and corner searched,' he answered. 'There is not a hole in which a cat could hide that I have not overhauled. But I'll have him yet.'

'I trust you may,' I replied. 'In the meantime we must await that result with what patience we can assume, I suppose.'

'You shall not wait long,' he answered as he rose

to his feet. 'My reputation is at stake, and I'll not rest till I have placed him under lock and key again.'

With that assurance he bade me good-day and left the room. As soon as he had gone I sat down in my chair for a good think. But overhaul every point of the evidence as I might, there was not a single ray of light to be discovered. I could not make head or tail of it at all, so I put it by and determined to wait patiently until the king should return.

When he did, and as soon as I had been requested to state my opinion, I asked his pardon for what I was about to say, and then laid the whole case before him. I described the difficulty I had found in gaining admittance to the court-room, referred to my belief that the man was a European and not a native as Roche insisted, told him how Roche had impressed upon me that he knew no French, and wound up with the sentence I had overheard while sitting on the battlements.

The king looked grave when I began, but when I finished he was graver still.

'My dear Instow,' he said, 'this is really very serious. I am more than sorry that you should have got this notion into your head. You must excuse me if I say that I think your dislike to Roche has made you find a reason other than he intended on

every action he has taken in this case. In the first place, my instructions to him, sent by the messenger from the spot where the attack occurred, were to the effect that he was to hold the man a prisoner until I returned. On no account was he to let him be seen or spoken to by any one other than himself from that moment. That, you may depend upon it, was why you were denied admittance, though I must confess I did not think of you when I gave the order. As to whether he was one of my own subjects or not, I cannot see that it matters, since he attempted my life. That would be sufficient were he French, Italian, Spanish, English, or Medang. As to the conversation you overheard, and the three words you mention, if I may be candid with you, I must say I scarcely see the point of your argument. Roche, of his own accord, informed me that he visited the prisoner in his cell before retiring to rest, in order to convince himself that he was safe. It appears you did not question him on that point. It is just possible that while there he himself may have used the expression which you attribute to my would-be assassin. But even if the other had used it, as you suggest, I cannot see that it affects the case in any way. No, no, I feel that you are my friend to the death, and I also know that you are not a man who would say an unjust thing about his

bitterest foe. All the same, I cannot believe that Roche had anything in common with the prisoner, and with due respect to you, dear Instow, it will take a great deal to convince me that he in any way connived at his escape.'

'In that case I am sorry I troubled your Majesty with my ideas,' I said, a little nettled that he should have taken them so lightly. 'I only told you my suspicions because you asked me, and I considered it my duty to do so. Let us say no more about it.'

He saw that I was foolish enough to feel hurt, and immediately crossed the room to where I sat and placed his hand upon my shoulder.

'You must not be vexed with me,' he said. 'I know that you meant your warning in a kindly spirit. But you would not altogether believe in me if I did not endeavor to be just between man and man. Roche has been a good and faithful servant to me for many years, and I should be worse than base if I were to doubt him in the smallest measure until I have absolute proof before me that he is playing me false. Come, let us put it by and endeavor to think of something else. I don't imagine we shall have much more trouble of a similar kind.'

At that moment, as if to distract our attention into another channel, Olivia entered the room, and



in watching her delight in her husband, and his pride in her, I completely forgot Roche and my seemingly ungenerous suspicions.

That night after dinner I broke the news of my intended departure to my friends. It came upon them as a shock, and I was flattered to see that the prospect evidently did not please them.

‘But why must you go, Instow?’ asked my sister. ‘We hoped and expected that you would remain with us for a long time to come. You are your own master and I cannot see that there is any need for such haste.’

‘You know how much it pleases us to have you,’ said the king, who was leaning upon the back of her chair.

The Princess Natalie said nothing, but it somehow drove my heart a few beats faster to notice that her head was bent as if to hide the blush that rose upon her cheek.

‘I think I must go,’ I replied. ‘I shall be away at most but a year. Then, if you will have me, I will gladly come back to you.’

‘A year!’ said Olivia. ‘That is a very long time.’

‘It will soon pass,’ I answered. ‘Sooner than you think.’

‘Well,’ said the king, seeing that I was determined to go, ‘on the understanding that you are to come

back to us in a year, we will give you leave of absence.'

'I give you my promise,' I replied. 'If I am able to move, I will be here in a year's time from now.'

That night when we had separated to go to our rooms Olivia knocked at the door of my sitting-room. After I had admitted her I saw that she had been crying. Upon my taxing her with it she stated that it was on account of my having decided to leave her.

'We have never been separated like this before,' she said, 'and I shall be so lonely without you.'

'But, my darling,' I answered, touched beyond measure at this candid expression of her love for me, 'you will have your husband and all your thousand and one new amusements and duties to interest you. You are happy, are you not, dear?'

'To say that I am happy does not express my state at all,' she answered, this time without hesitation. 'I would not change places with any woman in the whole wide world. I love my husband more than words can tell. And I have the best of all possible reasons for knowing that he loves me.'

'I don't think there can be much doubt about that,' I answered. 'One has only to see you together to understand that.'

Upon that introduction she dried her tears and

avored me with an exhaustive resume of the king's principal aims and objects in life. It seemed strange to me to hear Olivia of all other women in the world talk in such a fashion; but Love had transformed her, and she was no longer the same Olivia as of old. However, I was well pleased that she should have so thoroughly entered into her husband's thoughts and life, and I forbore to express myself in any way in a doubting vein. So I waited until she had seated her king upon the throne of All Asia, from the Arabian Gulf to Behring Straits, and then suggested that it was time she bade me good-night. As I spoke, it must have struck her for the first time that her tongue had been running riot with her, for she looked up a little shamefacedly, and then said with unusual meekness:

'You think I imagine that Marie is capable of accomplishing anything.'

'Certainly I do,' I answered, as I kissed her forehead; 'and if you wish to please me, you will always do so. Your husband is a wonderful man, and I pay you the compliment, my sister, of saying that I believe he could not have secured a better wife.'

'I am glad to hear you say that,' she replied. 'I want to be a help to him in his life's work. Good-night.'

'Good-night, dear,' I said. 'And may God bless

you and give you every happiness in your life with the man you have chosen.'

She gave me a little smile and then vanished from the room.

The following day was devoted to my preparations for departure, and to saying farewell to the friends I had made during my stay in the country. In the evening a valedictory banquet was given in the palace in my honor, at which His Majesty was gracious enough to propose my health and to wish me a pleasant and prosperous journey. Next morning early I bade my sister and her husband good-bye, boarded the yacht, and in a few minutes from the time the screw had begun to revolve, had turned the first bend of the river, and was out of sight of the capital of the Medangs. For a year I was destined not to see it again, and then I was to visit it at the most momentous crisis in its whole history.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## I RETURN TO THE MEDANGS.

It was a hot night in Simla, a year all but a month after I had said 'good-bye' to the Medangs. Even in the viceregal residence, situated as it is at such a height above sea-level, it was sufficiently stifling to be almost unbearable. What, therefore, it must have been on the plains, where many men were compelled by their duties to dwell, goodness alone knows.

Dinner was over, and His Excellency the Viceroy and myself were reclining in long chairs in the veranda, smoking our cheroots and watching the glorious Indian stars paling before the rising moon. It was too hot even for conversation, and our talk, which had begun so well, had dwindled down bit by bit, until, like an up-country river in summer time, it had been gradually absorbed by the general dryness, and had ceased to exist at all. I remember we had lit our cheroots with imperial federation, had smoked them half through on the question of colonial assistance in the case of international war, and

were about to discuss the advisability of establishing sundry new naval depots at the fag-ends of the earth, when a servant approached our chairs with a telegram upon a salver.

Never doubting that the message was for His Excellency, I took small notice, continued to smoke my cheroot, and watched the moon rising higher and higher above the shoulder of the hill. To my surprise, however, the man came up beside me and handed me the missive.

‘A telegram for me?’ I said, ‘and at this time of night. Who on earth can it be from?’

‘From Markburn, I expect,’ said His Excellency, referring to a visit I proposed paying the following day. ‘He probably desires to put you off according to his invariable custom.’

‘If you’ll excuse me, I’ll take it to the light,’ I said. ‘If it is from Markburn, and he wants me to postpone my visit, I shall be annoyed.’

‘You will not be the first, my dear Instow,’ said the Governor. ‘Markburn can’t help it, I’m certain, for as surely as he invites a man to a week’s shikar, to dine with him at his club, or to stay with him in his bungalow, so surely must he put him off at the last minute. I was warned against him by my predecessor, who had had experience of his ways and wanted to do me a kind action.’

Upon this I left him and made my way into the house. Once in the light, I broke the envelope and withdrew the contents. To my consternation, for this is the only word which conveys my meaning clearly, I discovered that it was from Marie. It had been despatched from Hong-Kong, and ran as follows: 'Come instantly. Serious trouble. Call upon Verman, Singapore.—Marie.'

I stood for a moment where I was, turning the thin slip of paper over and over in my hand. That the call was imperative admitted of no doubt; but the question that alarmed me most was: What had happened to occasion it? I thought of a hundred different things, but of course could not arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. One thing, however, was very certain; at any cost I must start for the Medangs without an instant's delay. Fortunately I had had the foresight to leave my yacht in Calcutta in case it might be wanted, and now if I sent a telegram on ahead to advise the skipper, she could be got ready to sail by the time I reached her.

I returned to the veranda with every pulse in my body throbbing like a piston rod. In the year that had passed I had been permitted sufficient leisure to analyse my own feelings and to discover exactly what I thought of His Majesty of the Medangs. Looking back upon my stay with him, I found that I was able

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to regard him in a more searching light, to discriminate more clearly between his actions, and to understand his motives with a greater degree of certainty. The fascination he had at first exercised over me was still as strong as ever, and now that he was in trouble my first impulse was to fly to his assistance as quickly as circumstances would permit.

Either His Excellency must have gathered by intuition that there was something wrong, or he must have seen from my face as I left the house that I had received unwelcome intelligence; at any rate he did not venture any jest regarding Markburn.

'I trust you have not received bad news?' he said, after I had seated myself again, and was nervously folding and unfolding the telegram I held in my hand.

'Unfortunately I have,' I answered, and as I spoke I handed him the paper. 'Look at it for yourself, and see if you can tell me what it means.'

His Excellency had already heard the story of my connection with the King of the Medangs, so that there was no need for me to enlighten him further on the subject. He lit a match, read the telegram, and then handed it back to me; after which he remained silent for upwards of a minute.

'This is, I suppose, the old trouble over the disputed boundary again,' he said. 'I have heard rumors for



some time past that the French were only waiting for a convenient opportunity to take action. Now I suppose they have found it. The king must be careful, or there is no saying what may not be the result. As for ourselves, the question is, what do you intend to do?"

'I must leave at once for Calcutta,' I answered, 'pick up my yacht there, and then set sail for the Medangs, calling at Singapore on the way to interview this man Verman.'

'Have you ever met him before?'

'Never. But I have heard of him from the king, who, I believe, places the utmost confidence in him.'

'Under such circumstances it would be absurd to say I am sorry you must go. But we will live in hopes that the trouble, whatever it is, will soon be satisfactorily settled, and that we shall then have the pleasure of seeing you with us once more. In the meantime, since you have no time to lose, I will endeavor to expedite your departure as far as possible.'

'I am sincerely obliged to you,' I answered, and then His Excellency left me to go into the house.

A week later India lay behind me, and I was on board my yacht, speeding across the Bay of Bengal as fast as steam and wind could take me. My impatience can be better imagined than described. Hav-

ing no companion with whom to while away the hours, I was thrown almost entirely upon my own resources. By day and night I tramped the deck, wondering what was happening in the Medangs, and studying the patent log with an impatience that would have been almost ludicrous had the events which caused it not been of such grave importance. At last, however, we approached Singapore, and then I knew that in less than twenty-four hours, all being well, I should have seen Verman, and have had my mind set at rest as to the reason of the mysterious telegram I had received.

As soon as we were at anchor in the harbor I went below to prepare for going ashore. I had just finished my toilet, and was about to leave my cabin for the deck, when the chief steward knocked at the door and informed me that a gentleman named Verman had come aboard and desired to speak with me. Bidding him show him to the smoking-room, I remained to close my porthole against the coal-dust, for the barges were already alongside, and then went up to the deck.

On entering the room just referred to, I found myself confronted by a tall, gray-haired military-looking man of about sixty years of age.

'Mr. Verman, I believe,' I said, holding out my hand, which he took and shook with extreme cordiality.

'That is my name, my lord,' he answered. 'I am acting under the instruction of His Majesty the King of the Medangs, who sent me to meet your yacht on arrival here in order that I might inform you as to the state of affairs in His Majesty's kingdom. I presume from your presence here that you have yourself received a communication from the king.'

'I received a cablegram from him while in Simla,' I replied. 'It was to the effect that serious trouble was brewing, and it also asked that I should return with all speed to his country. You may imagine how anxious I am to hear particulars.'

'With your permission, then, I will as briefly as possible narrate what has happened.'

'I should be glad if you would do so,' I replied. 'At present I am all at sea.'

'Well, my lord,' he began, as he lit the cigar I handed him, 'the situation is as follows: You will doubtless remember that upwards of two years ago serious trouble occurred between France and the Medangs owing to a disputed boundary line. His Majesty claims the tract of country in question as his property, while the French assert that it is theirs. On the occasion in question, by dint of the most careful diplomacy, the difficulty was smoothed over for the time being, but even His Majesty himself saw that the calm was only transitory and that before

Very long the same difficulty must inevitably crop up again. Six months ago, owing to the behavior of a number of French traders who were detected smuggling dutiable articles across the borders in defiance of the regulations, the guards along the frontier were doubled, and on one occasion a fracas took place between the troops of the two countries. France, acting up to her old tactics, claimed compensation, and was not only met with a blank refusal, but by a statement that any further encroachment on the land in question would be considered in the light of an act of hostility, and would be treated as such. She began encroaching immediately, and as a result war was at once declared.'

'Do you mean to say that the two countries are now at war?'

'That is what has happened. Though so far no battles of any size have been fought, there is no saying when the two armies will not be at each others' throats. It is a serious position, my lord; for His Majesty, able though he is, must see that he cannot hope for a moment to contend against so formidable a power as France.'

'This is very terrible news you give me,' I said, quite aghast at what I heard. 'I had no idea it would prove to be so bad. And what has the king desired you to do for me?'

'I am to convey you with all possible speed to the capital, my lord,' he said. 'His Majesty seems to set great store by your advice, and I was sent here to meet you and bring you on as quickly as we could go.'

'But why bring me on?' I asked. 'Surely we shall find no difficulty in reaching the city.'

'There is great difficulty, my lord,' he answered. 'The Medang River has been blocked this month past by French ironclads, and it would be impossible to enter it. If we desire to reach the king, we must land at a point that I have arranged some two hundred miles or so to the northward. There horses will be in readiness to take us on. Otherwise I don't see how it is to be managed at all.'

'You say you have arranged that horses shall meet us at this place?'

'If all has gone well, they will have been waiting there this week past,' he replied. 'Instructions were given to that effect before I left.'

'Then you will come on with me?'

'That is my intention, if your lordship will allow me to accompany you.'

'I shall be only too glad,' I answered. 'And now what other news have you for me? How is my sister?'

'Her Majesty was enjoying the best of health when

‘I left the capital,’ he answered. ‘You have doubtless heard that Their Majesties have an heir to the throne?’

‘You don’t say so,’ I replied. ‘This is the first I have heard about it. When was the child born?’

‘A month ago,’ said Verman. ‘His Majesty’s delight cannot be overestimated. The event has been the occasion of great public rejoicing.’

‘And the king’s health, how is that?’

Verman shook his head.

‘I fear I cannot give you a good report,’ he said; ‘His Majesty has aged terribly since your lordship left. It is feared that all this anxiety and trouble will have a bad effect upon him.’

For upwards of five minutes I continued to ask questions and receive answers. Then I suggested that my companion should go ashore and have his baggage conveyed on board, by which time we should have finished coaling and be ready to continue our journey.

A week later we had passed the Medang River, and were approaching the point where Verman had arranged that we should land in search of the horses which were to convey us to our destination. It was towards evening when we sighted the bay of which he had told us. The sun was scarcely a hand’s-breadth above the horizon, and the water was as

smooth as glass. Little by little the coast-line rose into view and still we continued to steam on. When we were scarcely a mile from the shore, Wells rang the telegraph from the bridge and the vessel was brought to a standstill. Such luggage as we had decided to take with us was already on deck, and nothing remained but to await the lowering of the boat that was to take us ashore and then be off. I had already arranged that the yacht should return to Singapore, and wait there until I should communicate with her skipper again.

Almost exactly as the lower rim of the sun touched the sea-line we took our places in the boat and set off for the shore. It was with a curious feeling that I sat in the stern and looked back at the vessel we were leaving. With her I seemed to be cutting the last link that connected me with my old life, and to be embarking upon a new one, the end of which I could not see or even guess at.

On reaching the beach we landed, and, taking with us two of the ship's crew to carry our baggage, made our way through the jungle which fringed the shore towards a curiously shaped hill which could be seen rising above the tree-tops half a mile or so away in land. Once we passed the remains of a native village, which had been so long abandoned that thick creepers twined across from hut to hut, but other

wise the forest might never have known a human foot, so silent and solitary was it.

When, however, we reached the foot of the hill above referred to, a different scene met our eyes. Situated at the base of a high cliff, which rose sheer as a wall to a height of upwards of two hundred feet, was a hut, and at the door of it a man, who on closer inspection proved to be a Malay, and a stalwart specimen at that. Recognising my companion, he sprang to his feet and saluted us respectfully.

Verman then questioned him as to the length of time he had been waiting for us, and learned that he had been there nearly a fortnight. The horses were stabled in a hut near by, and were quite ready for the ride to the capital.

Accordingly that night as soon as the moon rose into view above the tree-tops, the animals were led out, and we mounted. They were a fine pair of beasts from the king's own stables, and evidently in the very best of fettle. Twenty miles from our starting point we found another relay awaiting us, and in the same way at equal distances we exchanged our jaded beasts for fresh ones.

When the moon had disappeared from view again we rested until daylight, then resumed our ride until it was time to stop for the midday meal. The sun was sinking behind the hills as we neared our desti-



nation, and it was in a glow of rosy light that, emerging from the forest, we saw once more before us the citadel seated on its throne of rock. When my feelings were at that moment I cannot hope to make you understand, but I know that when I saw those stern gray walls appear before me and thought of what they contained, it was as much as I could do to look at them unmoved.

Spurring our horses to a last endeavor, we pressed through the town amid the enthusiastic welcome of the inhabitants and began to ascend the steep path to the citadel. It was plain that our arrival had been noticed, for a guard of honor was drawn up at the gateway to receive us. Our horses clattered under the archway and with the guard presenting arms we entered the courtyard to pull up before the palace steps. The group that I saw gathered there to welcome me I shall never forget. It included both the king and queen, and standing beside them, her hand resting upon my sister's shoulder—the Princess Natalie.

Springing from my horse, I clasped Olivia in my arms and kissed her, then shook hands with the princess, and afterwards with the king, who could scarcely greet me, so overcome was he with emotion.

'You must have ridden hard; we did not expect you for another day at least,' said the king after

had recovered himself a little. 'When your appearance on the plain was reported to me, I could scarcely believe it could be you. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for this prompt reply to my call.'

As he spoke Olivia put her hand in mine and with her eyes swimming with tears said:

'And I thank you too.'

The Princess Natalie was about to speak, but she stopped herself at the last moment. A bright flush crimsoned her fair face and made her look lovelier than I had ever seen her before.

Having expressed his approval to Verman, who stood waiting upon the steps, the king escorted me into the palace, where a room had been prepared for me. A delicious cold bath, followed by a substantial meal, quite revived me; and within an hour of my arrival I was able to accompany the king to his study and to hear the story of his trouble.

As I sat in a long cane chair by the window, and he stood before me with the light falling upon his face, I was able to take stock of him, and to observe the great change the last year had worked in his appearance. When I left the Medangs he had looked, even if he had not been, a comparatively strong man. Now he was only a shadow of his former self. His eyes were even more hollow than before,

though they still retained much of their fire; his cheeks were sunken, and he walked with a more decided stoop than I had remembered of old. His mind, however, was as clear and his faculties as acute as when I had first spoken to him of his kingdom.

‘Verman has probably explained all that has occurred,’ he said when we were alone together, ‘so that, beyond recapitulating the main points, I need not at present go deeply into that. In my own mind I am convinced that our enemies are taking advantage of the trouble that has occurred on the frontier to make an attempt to obtain possession of my kingdom, but fortunately I am prepared for them. Two or three small engagements have been fought with varying loss on either side, but so far nothing on a larger scale has been done. Here, as near as I can gather, are the particulars of our opponent’s forces.’

He led me to a table in the centre of the room, on which was pinned a large chart representing the kingdom of the Medangs. On a small slip of paper pinned to this, and colored to correspond with certain dots upon the chart itself, was an approximate estimate of the enemy’s forces, with their distribution; also an exact account of the Medang army in all its branches. The king pointed out to me the plan upon which he was acting, and described in glowing

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terms the qualifications of the generals holding the different commands. He told me that the temper of his troops was excellent, and I gathered from his words that he was quite confident as to the result. For my own part, however, I was not so sanguine. His army seemed too small and too untried to hope to be able to cope for any length of time with the forces France would be certain to put into the field against it; while the reserves he was mobilising, and upon which I was counting so much, would scarcely be sufficiently matured to afford them the support they undoubtedly would require. Taken altogether, the outlook was not a bright one, but for more reasons than one I determined not to allow my friend to suppose that I had any fear as to the ultimate result.

When we had discussed the situation in all its lights, had interviewed two officers leaving for the front, and my attention had been drawn to the bustle going forward in the arsenal, the king turned to me, and laying his hand upon my shoulder, said quickly:

‘But I am forgetting there is some one you have not yet seen. Come with me.’

So saying, he led me from the room, down the long corridor towards his consort’s apartments on the other side of the palace. Having learned from one of the women-servants the whereabouts of the queen,

we were conducted to the room in question. There we discovered Olivia seated by the window, holding in her arms a bundle, the sight of which almost brought my heart up into my mouth. On seeing her husband she rose and came to meet us. The king drew back the veil that hid the little face, and with a pride that I have never seen, showed me the countenance of his first-born son. I bent down and kissed it, and as I did so, for some reason for which I could not then account, the tears rose in my eyes and trickled down my cheeks. Had I been in a position to analyse my emotion as I did later, I should have contrasted the visit to the king's study with this call upon the nursery. The two events seemed so opposite. In the first I had had brought home to me the lamentable insufficiency of the king's forces and the consequent danger to the dynasty of the Medangs; in the second I had placed before me for my consideration the father's joy in the heir to the throne he had built up for himself. One, the thing he most desired; the other, what he most dreaded. Small wonder therefore that my heart was touched.

'If you could only realise, Instow,' said the king as he took the child from his mother's arms, 'how all my hopes in life are centred in this little one, you would come nearer understanding my character than you have ever done yet. For his sake I shall fight

to the death for my throne; and may God grant me success!

His words and the sincerity with which they were spoken went to my heart, and the glimpse I caught of Olivia's face over his shoulder nearly broke down my fortitude. Her love and her pride in her husband was a most pathetic sight to see, and if you had realised how everything that meant life to them was hanging by a hair, your heart would have been touched like mine. The king's health, the safety of his kingdom, nay, even the very life of this little child, trembled in the balance, and I could do nothing but look on and wait. But was there nothing I could do? There and then, heedless of the consequences, regardless of what difficulties it might raise up for me in England later on, I offered my services, which were immediately accepted. All I could do to keep Marie I. upon the throne should be done, and if he fell it should be through no fault of mine.

'God bless you, Instow,' said the king in a choking voice. 'With you at my back I shall feel even more certain of success than ever.'

'God bless you too,' said Olivia with unaccustomed seriousness, while the babe in her arms sucked his little dimpled fist and gazed round-eyed at his father and myself.

For the rest of that day and the day following we

were kept as busy as bees. Despatches from the front arrived in the early morning and at mid-day, and had to be considered and instructions given where necessary. There was the supply of arms and ammunition to be pushed forward for the new troops that were being hourly enrolled, officers of all branches of the service arrived to have audience with the king, and in addition there were all the thousand and one nameless odds and ends incidental to a campaign to be attended to.

Towards nightfall a messenger was announced with an important despatch from the front. It was to the effect that an engagement of some importance had been fought, in which the king's troops had been driven back. In the general's opinion another was imminent; and he gave the strength of the respective forces, and asked for instructions. A council meeting, consisting of His Majesty, the prime-minister, the Governor of the citadel, and myself, was immediately called to consider it. At any other time I would have resented Roche's presence after what had occurred between us, but in the face of this new danger I was not prepared to upset the king by raising minor difficulties.

'Gentlemen,' said His Majesty when we were seated at the council table, 'you have heard the news that has been brought to me this evening. I will not dis-

guise the pain this intelligence has caused me. However, as what is done cannot be undone, it behooves us to guard against a repetition of such a catastrophe. General Du Berg forwards me a plan showing his present position and also that of the enemy. I will spread it out upon the table that you may be able to study it for yourselves.'

He did so, and for something like five minutes we pored over it in silence.

'Now that we have made ourselves conversant with the situation of our troops,' he said when we had finished, 'we have to consider the general's question whether it is better to risk a big battle here, in the open country near the border, or whether it would be advisable to retire from our present position and endeavor to draw the foe after us into the jungle, where our men are more at home, and where we shall be in closer touch with our reserves. I shall be glad to hear your opinions upon that point.'

The question was a difficult one for a non-military man like myself to answer, and I waited for General Roche to speak first. My own opinion favored the latter alternative, but it appeared that the general's preference was decidedly for risking an advance. He felt confident, he said, that the reverse the Medang arms had just suffered was the effect of the shilly-shallying policy that had hitherto been adopt-



ed. There was a vast difference, he pointed out, in attacking and being attacked. Up to this time the French had invariably attacked, and in consequence, the heart of the troops had suffered. Let them, however, once obtain a success and their temper would be entirely changed. That success could only be obtained by advancing. On the other hand, if they were to retire into the jungle and allow themselves to be followed by the enemy, then the forces would be certain to imagine that their leaders were doubtful of success, and from that time forward the war might be considered at an end. The battlefield, he continued, was all in favor of their side, the troops were still willing, and under such circumstances it would be the greatest folly possible to think of withdrawing. So fervid was his language, so convincing his arguments, that I could see that the king was prejudiced in their favor. He was a staunch believer in his army, and would not dream it possible that they could remain long covered by this cloud of defeat.

Under these circumstances, it was with some trepidation that I gave utterance to my own humble opinions in favor of withdrawal. That they were not well received I must admit. His Majesty greeted them with scarcely concealed impatience, the prime-minister with surprise, and Roche with a

sneer upon his face for which I could have struck him. That the latter had some reason other than we knew for his advice I could not help feeling certain; but whatever I may have thought on the subject, I took care to keep to myself.

'I am sorry that you should not feel sufficient confidence in my troops to advise an advance, my lord,' said the king, more coldly than he had ever yet spoken to me.

'Your Majesty must remember that I do not know your army as well as you do,' I replied, 'and I only gave my opinion for what it is worth. Your men are at home in the jungle, and the French are not. Nature will assist you there as she will not do in the open, and, as you said just now, you will be more in touch with your reserves. However, both your Majesty and General Roche are military men; I am not. I therefore state my opinion with deference, and bow to your superior judgment.'

'If your Majesty will allow me to make a suggestion,' said Roche, 'I would advise that you visit the scene of action yourself, and consult with General Du Berg. You will then be placed in a better position for considering the merits of both plans and of judging between them.'

The king slapped his hand upon the table and then sprang to his feet.

'You have hit the nail on the head this time, General Roche,' he cried. 'That is the best advice I have received yet. I will certainly visit the scene of action myself.'

'But, your Majesty'——I began.

'My lord,' he interposed hastily and with a little show of impatience, 'we must have no more "but"s. My mind is made up. I shall leave for the front to-night. If I start in an hour, I shall be there by daylight, and then I shall see for myself what is best to be done.'

I looked at his haggard face, the stooped shoulders, and wondered that he could be so mad as to propose such an excursion. But in the face of his declared intention, I determined not to say anything on the subject to him. It would be better to find Olivia and get her to endeavor to persuade him from such a course.

This I did as soon as the council meeting was at an end, and she agreed with me that at any rate such a proceeding must be prevented. An hour later she came to me in my sitting-room.

'I can do nothing with him,' she said, almost with tears in her eyes. 'General Roche seems to have convinced him that the issue of the war depends upon his presence at this engagement, and nothing I can say or do will make him stay at home.'

'Then what is to be done?'

'We can only let him have his way,' she replied. 'But I cannot tell you how frightened I am for him. He is so ill, and he will take no care. He seems to think of every one and everything but himself.'

'Will it make you easier in your mind, dear, if I accompany him?' I asked.

'Much easier,' she answered quickly. 'I know I can trust you to see that he comes to no harm.'

'Then I will go. And throughout the time we are absent from the citadel he shall not leave my sight. Under those circumstances he cannot come to much harm.'

'God bless you, Instow,' said Olivia, and as she spoke the king entered the room.

When I told him that it was my intention to accompany him he seized my hand and shook it with all his old friendliness.

'Come with me, Instow,' he said, 'and you shall see my arms victorious. Remember they are fighting for my son and for my throne, and I know God will let them be victorious.'

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE PLOT THICKENS.

The sun was in the act of rising above the eastern hills when the king and I, dead tired after our long ride, urged our horses up the slope of the last hill, and reaching the top looked down and saw before us, on the plain below, the encampment of the army of which we had come in search.

'Thank God, we are in time. They have not retired,' said His Majesty fervently as he began to descend again. 'In another hour we might have been too late. I see they are already moving.'

I followed the direction of his eyes, and saw that men were hurrying in all directions. It was evident that something important was toward. A moment later, however, the jungle took us into its embrace, and for awhile we lost sight altogether of the camp. A brook lay before us, and our horses were in the act of crossing it when a sentry appeared from behind a mass of creeper and challenged us. Next moment we found ourselves face to face with a picket, the officer of which turned his men out in-

stantly on perceiving that he was in the presence of the king. Having discovered in which direction the general's headquarters were situated, we urged our horses on again, for we had left the jungle and were once more on open ground, and hastened towards them. The news of our arrival had spread like wildfire through the camp, and by the time we reached the hut towards which we were making our way, the general and his staff were standing before it ready to receive us.

General Du Berg, if I have not yet described him to you, was a fine-looking, well set-up man of about five-and-forty years of age. He carried himself with soldierly erectness, had short curly hair, blue eyes, a gray moustache, a gruff voice, and the reputation of ruling his men with a rod of iron. It was in a great measure to his exertions and the confidence reposed in him by his master that the army of the Medangs owed its efficiency, though he could never be induced to state in what country's service he had acquired his own training. Indeed, what countryman he was himself it was well-nigh impossible to tell. He spoke English, French, German and Italian with equal fluency, and was understood to have once confessed to several years' active service under the flag of one of the South American republics.

His surprise at seeing His Majesty was not as

great as I had expected it would be. He was doubtless accustomed to the king's rapid comings and goings, and thought it in no way strange that the sovereign should desire to be present on such a momentous occasion as the first real battle in which his army was to be engaged.

As soon as our greetings had been exchanged the king led the way into the hut, and I followed with the general. His Majesty looked very tired and pale after his long ride, and it was with delight I noticed that the general had ordered a meal to be placed upon the table for us. Marie, however, would touch nothing; he said he was too excited to eat. He hungered only for news.

'In which direction are the enemy encamped?' he asked, as he threw himself down on a seat.

'On the hillside across the plain, five miles due south of our present position,' replied Du Berg, with that brevity characteristic of him.

'Have they moved at all since you sent me that message yesterday?' asked the king.

'They have extended their outposts half a mile or so to the east and west,' he answered. 'Otherwise they have not made any perceptible change in their arrangements.'

'And your men—what of them? Are they prepared to retrieve what your despatch told me they had let slip?'

'They are ready for anything,' replied the general. 'They are furious at having been beaten the day before yesterday, and if I but give the word they will be at their enemies' throats like bulldogs.'

'They shall have their opportunity before many hours are over,' said the king. 'Let us hope they will take advantage of it. Now, is there any point from which we can see both camps and the land between?'

'If your Majesty will accompany me, I will show you everything,' Du Berg replied.

So saying, he led the way from the hut, and the king and myself followed him. Strong man though I was, our eighty-mile ride had tired me almost to the point of dropping; the king, however, seemed as fresh as when we had ridden out of the citadel gate ten hours before. It is my belief that he was too excited to feel fatigue; but I dreaded the reaction that must inevitably follow. He climbed the hill until he came to the point to which the general desired to bring him, and then leaning against a tree took careful stock of both camps and the stretch of sparsely-timbered plain, which would undoubtedly be the battle-field, lying between. When he had been looking at it for upwards of ten minutes, he consulted a paper he held in his hand, made several notes upon it, and turning to the general, asked him what he intended to do.



‘With your Majesty’s permission, I think we should advance while we have the opportunity,’ Du Berg answered. ‘The enemy are waiting for their reinforcements to come up, and if we are going to attack them at all, now is the time. We shall not find a better.’

‘Then let it be as you wish,’ said the king. ‘You had better give the necessary instructions at once.’

As he spoke I caught a glimpse of his face. It was deathly pale. Thinking he was unwell, I ran towards him.

‘You are feeling ill,’ I cried. ‘You have done too much. Will you not rest for a little while and let me give you some stimulant?’

He waved me off, however, declaring at the same time that there was nothing the matter with him.

‘I am tired, that is all,’ he said. ‘Let me see my men victorious and I promise you will have no fault to find with the color of my face.’

There was nothing for it but to be content with this assurance, and we accordingly turned our attention to the troops in the valley below. While we watched, a mule battery passed through the jungle behind us on its way to take up a position amongst some palms on an eminence half a mile or so to our right. The men looked as happy as schoolboys at the prospect of what was before them.

As I have already said, the main body of the

enemy had entrenched themselves upon a plateau on the side of a steep hill across the valley, a mile or so from where we stood. Thence they were able to observe all our preparations. To show that they were aware that our men had fallen in, a shell left their camp and burst with a terrific report in the jungle a little to the left of the general's headquarters. This was the first shot of the battle. A few minutes later the battery which had passed us was returning the compliment, and after that the engagement might have been said to have fairly started. For the first time in my life I was under fire, and I can assure you the situation was not altogether a pleasant one. More than once the shells seemed to be aimed directly for the spot where we stood, and on each occasion I made up my mind that I could not fail to be killed, but somehow they invariably changed their course before they reached us. At any rate we remained unhurt. The king all the time stood unmoved, watching the movements of his own troops and those of the enemy through his field-glass as composedly as if he had been witnessing a review from one of his own palace windows.

At the end of a quarter of an hour the general's instructions had been carried out, and the regiments were moving forward from the valley onto the plain, under the protection of guns on the hillside. Out

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in the open, however, it was a very different thing. Being within range, they were subjected to such a fusilade from the battery which had first opened fire upon us that they came to a sudden halt, and twice fell back, being unable to face it. The king watched the result with growing impatience.

'That battery must be silenced at any cost,' he cried, stamping his foot as the regiment nearest us showed signs of wavering.

'It shall be stopped if we can do it,' replied the general, and gave an order to an officer standing beside him, who immediately made his way down the hillside.

Five minutes or so later a column on the extreme left began to move forward towards the battery in question, but they had not proceeded more than a hundred yards across the plain before they too halted and began to evince a desire to turn back. At the same instant a wing of the enemy began to move along the lower side of the hill to the east with the intention of attacking us upon our left flank. Seeing this, His Majesty became almost beside himself, and before we could prevent him, had called up a trooper who was holding a horse a few paces to the rear. Then throwing himself into the saddle, he galloped down the hillside regardless of the broken ground and the shells and rifle-bullets which were descending on all sides of him like hail.

His action had been so sudden that it had taken us all by surprise, and nothing therefore remained for it but to watch and wait. We saw him gallop across the plain and finally reach the regiment in question. Once there, he pulled his horse to a standstill, and it was evident from his gestures that he was haranguing them. Shell after shell burst to right and left of him, and on one occasion three exploded almost simultaneously in the centre of the regiment not more than fifty yards distant from where he stood, causing such confusion that it seemed impossible it could ever unite again. At the same instant Du Berg's horse nozzled my elbow, and I turned to push him farther from me.

When I looked on the plain again, it was a very different scene I had before me. Raised to a pitch of wildest enthusiasm by the king's words, the regiment had sprung forward like one man, and with His Majesty at its head, was racing for the fort on the hillside, heedless of the leaden storm that was being poured into it. Still carried away by his excitement, His Majesty rode at its head, waving his sword and cheering his men on to the assault. I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes, and I dared not think of what might happen.

Nearer and nearer the regiment came to the hill. Another hundred yards would see it beginning its

climb, and already a second column was hastening forward to its support. Suddenly my glasses almost dropped from my hands, and I fell back against a palm with a choking sensation in my throat, such as I shall never forget as long as I live. At the foot of the hill the horse His Majesty was riding was shot under him, and I saw him go down with it.

That was sufficient for me. I could stand no more. Olivia's committal of him to my care flashed back upon me, and calling for a horse, I sprang into the saddle, and drove him down the hillside in the direction of the fort as fast as he could go. How he managed to get to the bottom at such a pace without breaking his neck, or how I escaped destruction from the shot and shell that were tearing up the ground all around me, are two things I shall never understand. Certain it was, however, that I did escape, reaching the hillside just as the men I was following were swarming on to the battery against which they had been led.

Heedless of everything save one irresistible desire to be by the king's side, if he were still alive, I urged my horse up the hillside, drawing my sword as I went. The gunners had resisted valiantly, but before our men they were like chaff blown by the wind. As Du Berg afterwards remarked to me, 'led by the king, the men would have stormed the gates of hell

itself, and thought nothing of it.' At any rate, by the time I reached the plateau the guns were silenced, the gunners were dead, and those who remained alive of the regiment, who had captured it with such conspicuous gallantry, were lying upon the ground utterly exhausted.

Bringing my panting horse to a standstill as soon as I reached the top, I dismounted and looked about me for the king. At first I could see nothing of him, and my heart went down to zero when I thought of Olivia and the news it might be my fate to have to carry to her. But a second glance relieved me of my anxiety. He was leaning against a gun-carriage, his dripping sword still in his hand, and his face white as the sheet of paper upon which I am now writing. A more ghastly sight could scarcely be imagined. His face was stained with blood from a cut upon his cheek, he was struggling for breath, and save for his dark, restless eyes, looked more like a dead man than a live one. Fortunately I had had the forethought to bring with me a flask of spirit, and seeing his condition, I hastened to pour him out a cupful. He drank it eagerly, and when he had done so, declared that he felt like a different man. I was about to expostulate with him for his rash act, but he would not hear me.

'This is no time for such talk,' he cried, with a wave of his hand. 'To-day I am showing the world

of what I and my troops are capable. To-day I am putting a new rivet into my throne, which will hold it together even more firmly than before, and one which will never be broken.'

As he spoke the regiment which had been sent to support him put in an appearance, accompanied by a battery which Du Berg had forwarded posthaste to work the guns that had been captured from the enemy.

Thus reinforced, His Majesty bade the senior officer re-form his men, for he had further need of them. While this was being done I endeavored to induce Marie to mount my horse. At first he would not hear of it, but after some considerable trouble I succeeded in making him do so. And it was well that I did, for almost at the same instant that he reached the saddle an aide-de-camp arrived from Du Berg, bidding the officer in command cross the valley at its narrowest point, and attack the left flank of the enemy with all the speed at his command. A glance at the main body on the plain showed us that it was advancing to attack the centre, while a regiment similar to ours had just been successful in carrying the position on the right.

'My children,' said the king, as he rode down the line, his face beaming with pride, 'you see what is required of you. Go forward, and may God prosper

your endeavors. Remember your king believes in you and is proud of what you have done this day.'

With a cheer that might have been heard a mile away, the regiment moved at the double down the hill on the side to the right of that by which they had ascended, and as they disappeared, the gunners sent to manipulate the captured guns opened fire upon the dark mass of the enemy. Then turning to the aide-de-camp who had waited to see the general's orders executed, the king bade him dismount and give me his horse. He could easily make his way back to the staff by way of the jungle, and once there he would be able to obtain a fresh animal without any trouble.

'Now for the coup-de-grace,' cried the king, pointing as he spoke to the main body of his troops which were pressing forward towards the hill under a heavy fire. 'Are you coming with me, or would you prefer to rejoin Du Berg?'

'You are surely not thinking of risking your life again?' I said, aghast at the folly of such a proceeding.

'I am going to lead my men to victory once more, if that is what you mean,' he cried, his eyes sparkling as he spoke.

For heaven's sake, think what you are doing,' I said. 'Remember your wife, your child, your



throne, and your people. What will become of them if you are killed?

'I have thought of them,' he answered, 'and it is for their sakes I am determined to rid my country of its foes. Are you coming with me or not? Have no fear; I shall not be hurt; my fate lies in a different direction.'

'You must know I shall not let you go alone,' I said, seeing that it was useless trying to persuade him against his rash act.

'Then, forward, my lord,' he cried; 'I will show you such a victory to-day as you never dreamt of. Let us be starting or we shall be too late.'

So saying we struck in our spurs and galloped down the hill at our best speed. The main body of the troops, under one of the king's oldest and most trusted officers, was charging directly up the middle of the valley, under a severe fire, towards the hill on which the enemy had intrenched themselves. Regardless of the dangers to which they were exposed, they pressed on, to the accompaniment of the thunder of the batteries on the heights above, the screaming of innumerable shells, and the cries of the wounded who lay thick upon the field behind them. From what I had seen of the troops prior to that time, I must confess that I should never have credited them with such obstinate courage. But

to-day their blood was up, their fighting spirit was roused, and with remembrance of the example that had just been afforded them fresh in their minds, there was nothing they would not do or dare.

When their king had crossed before them and it was realised that he intended personally leading them to victory, a yell of joy went up, and it was instantly noticeable that the great mass pushed on even faster than before. I was riding just behind the king, perhaps fifty yards in advance of the fighting line. If anything, my horse was a better one than his, and I had all my work cut out to keep him in his place. The excitement of that charge I cannot hope to make you understand. I had never experienced anything like it before, and I don't suppose I ever shall again. The rush through the crisp air, the roar of the battalions behind me, the wild lust of fighting that was rising in my heart, the total abandonment of all care, and the one set desire to come to close quarters with the foe, were sufficient to produce a peculiar kind of intoxication in which every emotion and every thought seemed quite distinct and enjoyable.

A few seconds now would bring us to close quarters with the foe; already I could see them crouched behind their works waiting to receive us. At this range the execution done by their guns was terrible

in the extreme. It seemed to me impossible that any man could live to reach that glittering line of bayonets. And yet, strange to relate, even while that thought was in my mind, I was conscious of no fear. If every other man in our army behind me were killed, it seemed certain that I should escape scot-free. I can only suppose that this must be the case with most men under similar conditions, otherwise no human being would surely be insane enough to run such awful risks.

For upwards of a hundred yards from the base of the hill, the plain was strewn with large rocks. In some places they were so close together that to go straight forward was a most difficult, if not well-nigh impossible proceeding. The pace, however, at which we were travelling rendered it an equally hard matter to turn to right or left. Under these circumstances, we were perforce compelled to continue in as straight a line as possible, dodging the obstacles in our way as best we might. This erratic course was destined to prove my doing or undoing, as I cared to consider it, for in endeavoring to avoid one rock I crashed into another, and the result was eminently disastrous. My horse leapt into the air in an endeavor to clear it, caught it full and fair upon his chest, and turned an almost complete somersault, throwing me over his head, and rolling upon me

When he had got me on the ground. I have a vague recollection of crawling under the shelter of the rock to avoid being trampled on, of observing the troops go panting by, and of seeing a young man have his head severed from his body by a shell, and the former come rolling and pitching towards me, before I lost consciousness and remember no more of what happened.

It must have been upwards of half an hour later when I opened my eyes again. To my surprise, I discovered that I was lying beneath a tree on the same palm-topped hill where I had been standing with the king and the general commanding when the battle had commenced. His Majesty was kneeling by my side with an anxious face, and one of the medical staff was feeling my pulse. As soon as they saw that I was once more conscious, a glass of brandy and water was given to me, and under the influence of this stimulant I was soon myself again, though woefully weak and sore.

‘What has happened?’ I asked of the king as soon as I could speak. ‘Did we capture the position?’

‘We have been victorious all along the line,’ he answered. ‘The enemy are now in full retreat.’

‘Thank God, I said. ‘Your Majesty has won a victory to-day of which any nation might be proud.’

When I was able to move, I rose, and leaning on

the king's arm, for I was still extremely shaky, lo across the battle-field. Already the ambul corps were hard at work collecting the wounde both sides, and conveying them to the improv hospitals which had been erected on the hill joining Du Berg's headquarters. The ene strong position on the other side of the plain well as the batteries to right and left of it, fallen into our hands, while a large supply of and ammunition had become our property. army, flushed with its success, was prepared anything, so the king informed me, and could difficulty be restrained from following the foe the jungle to which they had retreated.

Leaving the knoll, we descended to the headc ters' hut in order to recover ourselves after the ertions of the day. The sun was now directly head, and we had tasted no food since dayl Having satisfied our hunger, we laid ourselves d and in my case I know that in less than a mi I was as fast asleep as I had ever been in my li

When I woke it was three o'clock, and from commotion outside the hut it was evident that s thing important was happening. Having convi myself that the enemy must be advancing, I sp to my feet, and clutching my sword ran to the But it was nothing of the kind. Up the steep

that had been cleared through the jungle, a man was toiling on a worn-out horse. Covered with foam, lurching from side to side, panting so that we could hear him even at the distance we were from him, he made his way towards us. Who he was it was impossible to tell at that distance, but when he reached the hut a surprise was in store for us. He was none other than the young priest, whom I have mentioned to you before, His Majesty's chaplain at the citadel, Father Ambroise. I could hardly believe my eyes, and I could see that the king was equally astonished.

Having half-scrambled, half-dropped from the saddle to the ground, he staggered towards us, pulling a letter from his pocket as he came. He handed it to the king.

'What is the meaning of this?' cried the king, turning ghastly white as he spoke. 'What is it that brings you here?'

'Treachery, your Majesty,' cried the priest. 'Her Majesty the queen bade me deliver this as soon as my horse could bring me to you. I have ridden from the capital since sunrise this morning.'

As he spoke he gave a little sigh and next moment fell in a dead faint at our feet. Du Berg and one of his aides sprang to his assistance, and having picked him up carried him into the hut.

The king meanwhile had opened the letter, and was reading it as if his life depended on it. When he had finished he seized me by the arm.

‘For God’s sake, Instow, come with me,’ he said in a voice I hardly recognised. ‘This letter contains terrible news, and I must consult with you upon it.’

I followed him to a spot in the jungle some fifty yards or so from the hut. Here he turned and faced me.

‘Read that letter,’ he said, handing it to me, ‘and tell me what you think of it.’

I seated myself on a fallen tree and did as I was ordered. It was from Olivia, and read as follows:

‘The Citadel, Tuesday Night.

‘My own dear Marie—I have, I fear, terrible news for you. If I do not explain my meaning as well as I should otherwise like to do, remember I am writing in the greatest possible haste and in terrible distress of mind.

To-night, after you had gone, Natalie was walking upon the battlements alone. Quite by chance she sat down for a little while upon the parapet near the window of General Roche’s quarters. While there, she heard him in earnest conversation with a stranger, a Frenchman, who arrived in the citadel to-day under the pretence of seeking service under your Majesty’s colors. From what she overheard,

they were discussing the event which is to take place at midnight to-night. How I am to tell you of such treachery, such black double-dyed villainy, I do not know. One thing, however, is evident. Roche is the traitor Instow has always believed him to be, and not your faithful servant as you suppose. His plot is as follows: At half-past twelve o'clock to-night a messenger is to arrive, presumably from you, who will report that the army has received a terrible defeat, and that the king requires the instant services of as many of the garrison as can be despatched. Under pretence of complying with this demand, the majority of the troops, certainly all those who are faithful to your throne and person, will be marched out of the citadel into the surrounding country. A messenger will then be despatched to the French commander, who is now within fifty miles of the place, coming from the east with three thousand men, and before the troops can return the capital will be in the enemy's hands. Not knowing who may be in the plot, I have written this letter, and am now sending it to you by the Padre, who is the only person in the citadel we can trust. He will ride to the death, if need be, to deliver it into your hands; and when you receive it, you will take such action as you may think necessary. If you could only come in person, you would turn the tables on them, and we should be saved. As it is, I shall not give in while there is a man in the fortress to stand by me. God be with you, my husband.—Your devoted wife, Olivia.'



‘What is to be done?’ asked the king when I had finished reading, and handed the letter back to him.

‘We must think,’ I answered; ‘and that quickly too. What time was that letter despatched?’

‘The Padre says he left at sunrise this morning.’

‘Or in other words at five o’clock. He was here at three. What time is it now?’

‘Just half-past.’

‘Eight hours and a half to do the return journey. Can it be done, think you?’

‘It must be done,’ he answered vehemently. ‘Come what may, I must be in the citadel by twelve o’clock. Du Berg must find us horses, and we must start at once. I presume you will come with me?’

‘You may be sure of that.’

He held out his hand and gripped mine tightly in it.

‘God bless you for a true friend,’ he said. ‘And now for boot and saddle, and the king to the rescue. The traitors shall see with whom they have to deal.’

Five minutes later Du Berg had been informed of what had taken place at the capital, and was making arrangements to despatch a column to intercept the force that was making for the citadel from the east, and a quarter of an hour after that the king and I were on the backs of the best horses in the camp, proceeding across country as fast as our animals could take us to the rescue of the city.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE CONSPIRATORS BAFFLED.

After one has arrived at a certain stage of weariness there comes a time when one grows careless as to fatigue, if not almost unconscious of it. It was so in our case. During the previous twenty-four hours we had ridden eighty miles at express speed, had been engaged in a battle lasting upwards of six hours, and, as if that were not enough, were now starting back on a similar journey to that from which we felt we had only just arrived. For the first eight or ten miles we were so buoyed up by the excitement of the enterprise upon which we were embarking, that we had scarce a thought for anything save the necessity of speed. Then the dull monotony of the ride settled upon us, in which the reiterated sameness of the jungle scenery, and the steady, almost mechanical movements of our horses, played such a part that it appeared as if we were destined to continue in the same employment throughout eternity. That we should reach the capital in time

to be of any use to the garrison struck us as being quite as improbable as that there could be a termination put to our anxiety. Like the idea of death to a young man in the full tide of his health and strength, both contingencies seemed so remote as to require no consideration, and yet it was towards both that every stride was carrying us.

The horse upon which the king was mounted was a dark bay with black points, standing upwards of sixteen hands. Mine was a black, half a hand shorter, but boasting, if possible, a little more breeding. Both were magnificent animals, born and bred in the king's stables, and trained under his own personal supervision. Fortunately for us they were in the very pink of condition, and having been born in the country, were stronger than any imported animals could have been. On this occasion their strength and endurance would be tested to the uttermost, and what would become of us if either should prove unworthy of the trust reposed in him I dare not think. Upon their swiftness depended a king's throne, a nation's independence, a young child's future, and his parents' lifelong happiness; surely load enough for two uncomprehending beasts.

The sun was beyond his meridian as we left the camp, he was lying on the tree-tops like a ball of fire when we forded the Ki-yin River, and told each

other that the first twenty-five miles of our journey were accomplished. Ahead of us a yawning gulf of fifty miles still lay and looked as if it could never be overcome.

Crossing the river, the waters of which showed blood-red in the glorious sunset, we climbed the opposite bank and then pulled our horses up for a few moments' rest within a tope of palms that grew beside a ruined temple. With the exception of a horde of monkeys in the trees overhead, and a couple of crocodiles basking upon the mud a hundred yards or so farther down the bank, we were the only living creatures to be seen. The evening breeze rustled the jungle foliage and moaned among the ruins of the temple which stood up gaunt and lonesome amid the bush and which must have been old when England was young. It was not a cheering sound by any manner of means, and neither of us were sorry when it was time to tighten our girths again and continue our ride. As we settled ourselves in our saddles, and took up our reins, I stole a glance at the king. To judge from his face, his heart might have been holding all the accumulated sorrow of the world. He looked wretchedly ill, and I could not help thinking that if he reached the end of the journey it would be as much as he could possibly accomplish. Even that appeared impossible.

The sun sank lower and lower behind the trees, and as he disappeared the shadows lengthened upon the ground. Still our horses preserved their even pace, and side by side we sped along, now dodging the boughs of trees and masses of overhanging creeper, now avoiding a treacherous pool, now disturbing a brace of jackals at their evening meal, anon swinging out into open glades where the frightened deer gave one glance at us and then disappeared like lightning flashes into the surrounding forest. Once, slinking through the undergrowth, we espied a tiger making his way to his favorite hunting ground. He was not twenty paces from us, and as we passed he drew back his lips, and uttered that peculiar coughing sound that only a tiger makes when he feels that fate is against his hunting, and he will probably go supperless to bed. A moment later we had left him to his solitude, and were speeding on as if to meet the rising moon.

The pale goddess of the night was sailing high in a cloudless sky as we climbed the low range that marked the half-way line of our journey. Over our heads rose the bluff outline of the hill, with every peak, every rock, and every feather-topped palm standing out in silhouette against the steel-gray sky. Behind us the jungle stretched like a dark sea, broken here and there with a touch of silver,

where the moon's rays caught the still water of some pool or river. A night bird called from among the rocks, otherwise the landscape was as still and silent as a place of the dead.

Reaching the spot we had been aiming for, a small plateau situated almost at the summit of the hill, we pulled our horses up, and descending from our saddles, unloosed our girths, and slipped the bits from their mouths. A small pool lay among the rocks to our right, and our tired animals, which, as may be imagined, were thirsty after their long journey, became impatient to get to it. But heated as they were, it would have been the wildest folly possible to have permitted such a thing, so we contented ourselves with rubbing them down with handfuls of grass, and then, having secured them to a tree, threw ourselves upon the ground and stretched our tired limbs.

'It is just eight o'clock,' said the king, who had consulted his watch, 'and we have still forty miles before us. Can we do it, think you? Will the horses hold out?'

'They must,' I answered. 'They are generous creatures, and we must ride them to the death if need be.'

Unable to remain still for many minutes at a time, the king rose, and crossing the little open space,

stood with his elbows resting upon a rock, gazing down at the moon-lit plain. Feeling that it would be the wisest course to leave him to his own thoughts, I did not disturb him, but contented myself by attending to the horses with what strength I could muster for the work. Finding that they had in a great measure recovered their coolness, I led them to the pool and allowed them to swallow a dozen mouthfuls of water each. This done, I permitted them to feed for a moment upon the luscious green grass that surrounded the pool, and then led them back to their tree, and once more made them fast. After that I drew from my holster the flask, which I had taken the precaution to fill before leaving the camp, and also the biscuits I had placed there. Approaching the king, I poured him out a cupful of brandy and water, and to be certain that he took it I watched him drink it. The biscuit he refused point-blank, asserting that to attempt to make him eat anything in his present state would inevitably be to choke him. As soon as I had finished my own meal, the time we had arranged to allow ourselves for rest was at an end, and we unhitched our horses, and having girthed them up, swung ourselves into the saddles. Then for the first time since we had set out I really discovered how tired and stiff I was. To move caused me the most exquisite torture, and to lift

my weight into the saddle nearly brought a cry from my lips. The horses, however, seemed much refreshed by the spell, and made their way up the hillside in a very different fashion to that in which they had approached the pool. Reaching the top, we began our descent, and in somewhat less than half-an-hour were moving swiftly across the plain on the other side of which the capital was situated.

You must try to imagine for yourself, my dear Forsyth, my feelings during the ride that followed. For some time a peculiar waking nightmare possessed me. One moment I imagined myself back in England, and strangely enough, in my place in the Lords, during a debate on the question of the independence of the Medangs; at another I was on my yacht's deck, speeding across the Gulf of Siam to the king's assistance. Then I would seem to wake to the reality of my position, and with a word or two of encouragement to the king, would urge my horse to greater efforts. Long before the first twenty miles of the second half of our journey had been accomplished our animals were showing unmistakable signs of fatigue. It was plain that they were less careful of their footing than before, reeled somewhat in their gait, and on one occasion my poor beast stumbled upon a tree root and came within an ace of hurling me headlong in the centre of the





track. Knowing that it would mean the complete shattering of all our hopes if we rode them out to the bitter end, I called upon the king to stop. At first he did not hear me, but on my repeating my cry he pulled up, and turning in his saddle faced me.

‘What is it?’ he cried huskily. ‘Why do you stop? For heaven’s sake, man, remember how much depends upon our speed.’

‘I do remember,’ I answered, as I sprang to the ground. ‘And I also know that if we do not rest our horses we shall not reach our destination. My animal is almost done, and yours is not much better. We must give them a quarter of an hour at any hazard.’

‘A quarter of an hour?’ he cried, in a voice that went to my heart, so full of pain was it. ‘Do you know what a quarter of an hour may mean? It may mean death to every hope I have in life, and destruction to all I hold dear in the world.’

‘To ride that animal another mile will mean worse even than that,’ I answered with brutal candor. ‘To give them a chance to recover themselves a little may mean your salvation. Come, my friend, descend from your saddle, and let me look at your beast.’

With that he dismounted, and instantly fell full length upon the ground, his legs being no longer equal to the task of sustaining his weight. I gave

him another drink from my flask, and when I had taken one myself, proceeded to look after the horses. First I removed the saddle of the animal the king had been riding, and then, holding him by the bridle, allowed him to roll upon the soft grass. When he had done so, and after he had shaken himself, he scrambled to his feet again. I then allowed my own beast to follow his example, which he did without waste of time. After that I rubbed them both down with some dry grass as before, and resaddled them. This work finished, I rinsed their mouths with brandy and water from my flask, and then informed the king that I thought we might proceed again. With the word his strength seemed to come back to him like magic; he sprang to his feet without the assistance which I stood ready to give, and reached his saddle. Having seen him safely there, I mounted my own beast, and we then recommenced our ride.

Even after this long interval, the agonies of the next hour and a half seem as fresh to me as when I was enduring them. Slowly, and to the accompaniment of pains that racked me with every stride my horse took, the miles drifted by, until we were not more than ten miles distant from the capital. Small as was the distance compared with what we had already overcome, yet it seemed as if we should never be able to accomplish it. The horses no longer moved with any spring, but with a strained action

that now grew more jerky and more uncertain with each succeeding mile. Already the jungle was thinning out, and signs that we were approaching the city were becoming more and more apparent. In another half hour at most, if only Providence would support our tired beasts, we felt we ought to be seeing the gray peak of the castle rise before us. Then the town once behind us, nothing but the steep path to the citadel would remain between us and those we wished to reach. But would Providence uphold our horses for that length of time? That was the question which caused us such untold anguish.

The jungle once done with, a long strip of open land cultivated here and there in small blocks lay before us. Then came another small strip of forest, and after that the suburbs, if I may so call them, of the city. Though I could not of course see them, I knew that our spurs were red with blood; indeed, my legs ached with the repeated blows I had been compelled of late to give my poor brute's sides. No longer did they gallop with heads erect, but they held their noses almost to the ground, thereby spoiling the pace and doubling their chances of a fall.

'It cannot be done,' cried the king, as if his soul were being torn from him. 'They are dead-beat, and another mile will be as much as they can manage.'

‘Courage, my friend,’ I shouted back. ‘We will not say die until we’re beaten. At most we have not more than five miles to do.’

‘Five miles!’ he cried. ‘You might as well say five hundred.’

I did not answer, and in silence we continued our ride. The moon was behind a cloud, as indeed our fortunes seemed to be. But presently she emerged again, and as she did so we caught a glimpse of the citadel rock, rising dark and forlorn from out of the plain before us. The king saw it as soon as I did, and I heard him mutter hoarsely, ‘Thank God! thank God!’ Almost at the same instant his horse stumbled, and went down crash upon the ground, throwing its rider from the saddle as a catapult hurls a stone. I pulled up instantly, and jumping from my saddle ran to his assistance, only to discover that he was quite unconscious. Almost raving at the untowardness of our fate, I bathed his forehead and his lips with spirit, chafed his hands, and endeavored by every means known to me to bring him back to life, but without success. He lay as he had fallen, his eyes closed, and his white haggard face turned up to the moonlight.

Well-nigh beside myself with despair, I pulled out my watch and examined the face. It was exactly a quarter past eleven. If we did not reach the castle

in three-quarters of an hour, we should be too late to prevent the mutiny and to save those we loved. What on earth was to be done? I racked my brains without arriving at a conclusion.

Suddenly an idea occurred to me. Somewhat less than a mile farther on was the house of the Chowmung, or head-man of the village, just beyond the city boundary. If I could only manage to get the king as far as that, I might leave him there in safe quarters, while I pushed on to the citadel, and took the affair of the rescue into my own hands. But how I was to get him even such a short distance I could not for the life of me see. His own horse was dead-lame, and even if he were not, he was hopelessly worn out, so that I might dismiss him from my mind at once. My own animal was in well-nigh as bad a condition, and even if he had been fresher, he could never have borne the weight of two such men after his journey of eighty miles. There was only one way out of the difficulty. I must leave the king where he was, and hurry on to the Chowmung's house and inform him of what had happened. He would then send for the king while I hastened on to the citadel.

No sooner had I arranged all this in my mind than I hastened to act upon it. Drawing the king's body a little off the road, I made him as comfortable as

circumstances would permit, beneath a tree, and then, mounting my horse, urged him forward at his best pace toward the residence of the Chowmung in question. It was not long before I reached it, and still less time elapsed before I had the man I was in search of out in the cool night air listening to my tale. He was most concerned, and assured me that that very instant he and his son would hasten with a buffalo cart to the place in question. Once they had found their prince I knew he would be as safe as in his own castle. Under the present circumstances perhaps safer.

As soon, therefore, as I had assured myself that he intended to do what he promised, I urged my weary horse forward again, and in less than ten minutes was toiling up the main street towards the citadel path. That once reached, I realised that it was no use my asking more of my generous beast, which now stood still, shaking like an aspen leaf. I sprang off and taking my revolver from my holster, and placing it in my pocket, left my steed to take care of himself, and hastened up the steep path. By the time I reached the top I was more dead than alive.

Once at the gates, I paused for a moment to recover my breath, and then endeavored to understand

in what manner I should proceed next. For every reason it was necessary that I should act with the greatest caution. One fatal step might ruin everything and everyone, and then God help those whom we had come in such haste to save.

Advancing to the great gate, I was about to beat upon it with my sword, when a large pebble (I have it in my possession now) fell from the battlements above, and struck me upon the helmet. I looked up instantly, to find a man leaning over the coping, making frantic signals to me. Before I could realise his intentions, a rope descended, and fell within my reach. It was plain from this that I was to be drawn up by way of the wall, without troubling the guard at the gate. One thing, however, puzzled me, and made me feel a little anxious. Who was I supposed to be? If they thought me the messenger from the French, I should fall into the traitor's hands nicely; but on the other hand, I questioned how should I be better if I knocked at the gate, for I could not suppose that Roche would be foolish enough to allow any but his own partisans to be on duty on such an important night. So having discussed the question with myself in this fashion, I made up my mind as to what was the best thing to do, and then tied the rope securely under my arm. That done, I took a good grip upon it above my head,

and having given a little jerk as a signal to begin to pull, was next moment lifted off my feet and dragged up the face of the wall.

By the time I reached the top, I had had about enough of it. My weight on the end of the long rope caused me to swing round and round like a teetotum, and once or twice I came perilously near breaking my head against the wall. However, all is well that ends well, and in a very short time I found myself being dragged over the coping by eager hands. 'Now,' thought I to myself, 'I shall discover who I am supposed to be, and then my fate will be decided for me.'

As soon as I had recovered my breath I sprang to my feet and faced the men who had pulled me up. I say the men, for the reason that there were two of them. To my joy, however, I discovered they were friends, not foes. One was the old steward of the palace, an Italian named Polacci, as faithful a fellow as ever lived, while the other was a Malay servant named A-Mat, whose devotion to the king's person was proverbial throughout the country. How it was that Roche had allowed them both to remain at large I shall never be able to understand.

'Thank Heaven, my lord, you have come,' whispered Polacci as soon as he had discovered my identity; 'but where is His Majesty? The queen expected you both.'



'Your king has met with an accident upon the road,' I answered, 'but he is safe with friends. Now let us consider what is to be done. What is the time?'

'Just twelve o'clock, my lord. The palace clock struck only a few minutes since.'

'And where is General Roche?'

'In his quarters, I believe, my lord, with the Frenchman who arrived last night.'

As if, however, to show that we must not take anything for granted, just as he spoke we heard footsteps on the stone stairs to the right of where we stood. Polacci was the first to appreciate their meaning.

'Quick, my lord,' he whispered. 'One of those footsteps is the general's. We must hide ourselves, or all is lost.'

With a strength I could scarcely have believed his meagre frame to have possessed, he dragged me in the direction of a large buttress which stood out from the wall some six or eight feet. There, in the shadow, the three of us crouched, keeping as close to the wall as it was possible for us to do.

As Polacci had said, one of the new arrivals was Roche, the other was a man whom I then thought I had never seen before, but whom I rightly set down

in my own mind as the Frenchman of whom we had been told. It was evident they were taking a last walk round the walls in order to see that everything was in readiness for their scheme. How little they guessed who was near them, only awaiting his opportunity to upset all their plans. Closer and closer they came to where we crouched, until they were only a few feet away. Fortunately they were approaching from the other side of the buttress, otherwise they could scarcely have failed to see us.

‘Ah, I wish I had your confidence, friend Gaspard,’ Roche’s companion was saying. ‘You are so certain that all will go well. But what if the men should discover that the king is not dead, and what if His Majesty should put in an appearance before you have got them out of the castle? How would you fare then?’

‘It is no use considering either alternative,’ said Roche confidently. ‘The men will not find out their mistake until I have them safely cornered, and his Majesty, bless his royal heart, is at this moment tucked up in his blankets upwards of a hundred miles away, so I have no fear of him.’

‘Ah,’ said the other with a sigh of envy, ‘what a man you are to be sure? If I had your powers I might do anything.’



'If I were such a craven cur as you, I should do nothing,' retorted Roche with a sneer that cut like a knife.

'There is nothing, my friend, to be gained by calling one's fellow-workers names,' said his companion.

'I am best judge of that, and you'd better leave it to me,' answered Roche. 'Now let us hasten round and see that all is right. After that we'll return to my quarters and prepare for the messenger who will be here in twenty minutes or so.'

'I am at your disposal, cher ami,' said the other, and they resumed their walk.

When we had given them time to get well out of hearing we crept from our hiding-place and were about to make for the steps leading down to the palace when I paused and turned to Polacci.

'Polacci,' I said, 'at any cost the king must be brought here and at once. Who can I send to fetch him?'

'If your lordship will trust me, I will go at once,' he said.

'I would rather trust you than any man, but how can you get out?'

'You must lower me over the wall,' he answered. 'Then I will hasten with all speed to the residence of the Chowmung and bring His Majesty hither.'

‘Come along then, let us lower you,’ I replied. ‘There is no time to lose. But first give me the key so that I may get into the palace when you are gone.’

He did as I wished. The rope by which they had dragged me up was then fastened under his shoulders and made secure. That having been done, old man as he was, he scrambled over the edge of the wall with as little fear as a boy would show in climbing for a sparrow’s nest.

‘Lower away gently, my lord,’ he whispered; and we did as he desired.

Once he was at the bottom the rope was drawn up, and after that, with A-Mat at my heels, I made for the palace steps.

As it turned out I need not, however, have asked for the key, for when I reached the door leading into the Fountain Courtyard I found it opened and Olivia standing within, with Natalie beside her, waiting to receive me.

‘Instow? Oh, thank God,’ she cried, and threw herself into my arms. ‘But where is Marie? Why is he not with you?’

‘He will be here soon,’ I answered, as I shook hands with the princess; for I was resolved on no account to tell her that the king had met with an accident, at least not until I was obliged. ‘Now let

me come in and prepare for what is before me. No one must see me until the proper moment.'

'No one will see you,' she said. 'But you must have food first. Natalie and I have prepared everything for you. We knew you would come as soon as you received my letter by the brave Padre.'

She led me as she spoke into her own boudoir. There I found a meal spread out upon the table. I ate what I could, and taking some more with me, hurried to the king's study, which overlooked the courtyard.

Ten minutes passed, and no sign came of the messenger Roche was expecting. The clock upon the wall chimed a quarter to one and still he did not put in an appearance. I began to grow anxious. Could anything have gone wrong with him, or had he arrived while I was in Olivia's boudoir?

Just as I was beginning to reproach myself for having delayed my coming to the room where I now was, I heard a thundering at the gate, and a moment or two later a horseman galloped under the arch and into the square. Passing the palace at full speed he drew up before General Roche's door and dismounted just as the latter came rushing forth to inquire what the matter was.

Five minutes later a bugle-call rang out, and before a man could have counted a hundred the sol-

diers were pouring from the barracks in all stages of undress.

When they had fallen in, Roche came from his quarters, and mounting the coping of the well in the centre, proceeded to address them. He told them that a dispatch had just arrived from the front in which General Du Berg stated that the army had been beaten back with terrible loss, and that the king had met his death upon the field. A deep groan burst from the ranks at this dire intelligence, which speedily changed into a roar when the governor of the citadel informed them that they were to march at once against the foe in order to avenge him. He bade them return to their quarters in order to prepare themselves for the campaign. In a quarter of an hour they would leave the citadel.

This quarter of an hour's grace was a greater boon than I had anticipated, and I thanked God for it with all my heart and soul. By the time the bugle sounded again, I should have made my preparations, and would be ready for anything that might happen.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE DEFEAT OF GENERAL ROCHE.

The clock had chimed a quarter past one, and the moon was exactly balanced upon the western wall when the bugle sounded the second time for the troops to fall in. As it did so my heart beat so fast that I almost thought it would choke me. I was playing for high stakes, and I tried to calm myself; for one little show of nervousness or indecision might ruin everything.

In the courtyard outside the garrison was standing at attention. The officers were hitching up their sword-belts, and in other ways preparing for the march before them. But look as I would, I could see nothing of Roche. Was it possible that he intended to remain behind in order to welcome the foe when they should arrive? In that case the plan I had arranged for myself would be certain to miscarry. The hair rose on my scalp, and a cold shiver ran through me as the thought occurred to me.

Five minutes elapsed before he put in an appearance, but when he did, I was relieved to see that he was prepared to march out with the column. Having scanned the battalion, he gave a few orders in a sharp voice, and then took his place in the order of march. As he did so, I left the window and made my way from the room across the Fountain Courtyard and up the stone steps on to the battlements, calling as I went to A-Mat to follow me with a torch, as arranged. Once there we ran as fast as our legs would take us to the stairs leading down to the great gate. We only reached them just in time, for as we took our places, myself a few steps from the bottom, and A-Mat with his blazing torch behind me, the foremost files were but a few paces from the archway.

'Halt!' I cried, at the top of my voice, and with every ounce of command I could manage to cram into it, at the same time holding up my hand as a signal to them to stop.

As if by clockwork the surprised battalion obeyed, while Roche spurred his horse forward to discover what this interruption might mean. Thank God, he acted just as I had hoped he would do, and now I was prepared for him.

'Men!' I cried; 'Soldiers of King Marie, in His Majesty's name I forbid you to move one pace for-



ward. You have been told that the king is dead, and that the army under General Du Berg has been defeated. The messenger who brought that news did not come from the army at all. But I left this afternoon, and I can tell you that, far from being defeated, the army has been victorious all along the line. We have won a great victory, and those who have spread this report are leading you into a trap. Return to your quarters, and leave me to deal with those who are attempting to deceive and ruin you.'

When I had finished speaking there was an instant's silence, in which I saw Roche's face working with astonishment and suppressed passion.

'Lieutenant,' he cried, turning to an officer at his side, when he had recovered himself a little, 'take a file of men and arrest that person. Let him be confined in a cell until I return. Throw open that gate there, and now, my men, forward.'

'The first man who moves will answer for it to the king,' I cried, as the officer in question came haltingly forward to arrest me.

'The king is dead,' shouted the general, 'and I act in his place.'

As he finished speaking, my ears detected a hammering upon the gate outside. Was it the king, or was it another part of this infernal plot? But this

was no time for half measures; I had to risk that or lose everything.

‘Open that gate,’ shouted Roche again.

The great gate was accordingly unbarred and thrown back, but neither Roche nor the men behind him moved. My heart seemed to stop beating as I leant forward to see who entered. Then such a shout went up as never a man in that courtyard had heard the like before, for there, seated upon his own magnificent state charger, who stood tossing his head and champing his bit as if conscious of the value of the performance in which he was taking part, was the king himself, looking pale and very weary, but otherwise as well as when he had left the camp with me more than eight hours before. Behind him was old Polacci grinning from ear to ear. The king regarded Roche steadily for upwards of half a minute. Then he spoke, and his voice sounded clear as a bell.

‘You see you were mistaken, general,’ he said quietly. ‘In spite of your machinations I am still alive and well.’

The general must have realised that the game was lost. At any rate he did not attempt to say a word in return. He looked at me and then at the king, and then backwards and forwards from one to the other of us, as if he hardly knew which of us to

hate the most. His face was working strangely, and in my own mind I thought he was about to have a fit.

'You are placed under arrest, general,' said the king. 'Colonel Prennan, I appoint you Governor of the Fortress, and I shall hold you responsible for your prisoner, also for a Frenchman who, I am told, is within the walls.—Now, my men, you may return to your quarters. I have no intention that you shall be delivered into the hands of our enemies just yet.'

Prennan, the new Governor of the citadel, approached Roche with the intention of demanding his sword. As he reached him the latter was observed to sway somewhat in his saddle, and afterwards to clutch at his horse's mane. Then he seemed to choke, and a moment later fell from his charger's back to the ground. The doctor hastened to his side, but it was only to report him quite dead. The excitement of the past few days, followed by the disappointment caused by the failure of his plot, had been too much for him, and, as it was discovered later, his heart had given way under the strain.

It made a strangely dramatic picture, and one that I think few who saw it will be likely to forget.

The moon lighting the farther side of the courtyard, the staring soldiery, A-Mat holding his torch aloft upon the steps, myself standing below him,

the king sitting in the dark gateway upon his gray charger, and the traitor Roche lying dead upon the ground, with his white face and great eyes staring up at us as if in mockery of our vengeance.

‘General Prennan!’ cried the king in a significant voice, thereby giving the new Governor of the citadel his step in rank, ‘let that man’s body be conveyed to the mortuary. When that is done, find me the Frenchman of whom I spoke just now. Let him be detained in custody until I can examine him.’

Having said this, he turned to me, and dismounting from his horse, took my arm, and we made our way towards the palace steps. I noticed that he seemed uncertain in his walk, and that his hands were feverish to a degree that frightened me. But I attributed this more to his fall than to any direct illness.

‘Instow,’ he said, as we walked along, ‘I am deeper in your debt than ever. God alone knows what I should have done without you this night.’

‘I am more than thankful to have been in a position to serve you,’ I answered.

Then thinking I should divert him from his gloomy thoughts—for that they were growing gloomy I had no doubt—I bade him look up at the palace door. Olivia and the Princess Natalie were standing there waiting to welcome him. The meeting between hus-

band and wife was touching in the extreme, Olivia bursting into tears as she kissed him. Strangely enough the king seemed scarcely so much affected as I had expected he would be. He continued to glance to right and left as if he suspected some harm, moving his head in a mechanical fashion that was the reverse of reassuring.

Leaning on his wife's arm he passed into her boudoir. Here the meal of which I had partaken an hour or so before was still spread upon the table, and we endeavored to induce the king to eat. But he would touch nothing. His eyes by this time were inordinately bright, and I could see that Olivia was becoming alarmed as to his condition. She crossed the room and knelt at his feet, placing her soft arms on his.

'You have done too much, Marie,' she cried. 'You have nearly killed yourself by this long ride. My darling, you must go to bed at once and I will nurse you. Believe me, you will be better in the morning.'

He tried to rise, saying as he did so in a voice whose dead level was terrible to hear:

'You do not understand. If we cannot carry the position all is lost. No, you must not stop me. I am not well, but I shall die if we do not win to-day.'

Olivia turned her face to me with a look of agony such as I shall never forget as long as I live. In

reply to her unspoken entreaty I rose and went towards the king.

‘Come, your Majesty,’ I said, ‘this will not do at all. The sooner you are in bed the better it will be for you.’

‘Bed?’ he cried, with an attempt at scorn in his voice, ‘how can I go to bed when my kingdom trembles in the balance? Do you know what it all means to me? It means that life, love, and honor hang by a hair, and you talk of bed. No, no.’ Then after a pause: ‘I tell you Du Berg must advance or the day is lost.’

He was silent for upwards of a minute, then his senses seemed suddenly to come back to him, and he smiled a little foolishly.

‘I’m afraid I have been talking nonsense,’ he said apologetically; ‘but I am not feeling quite myself to-night. I think I shall go to bed. Olivia, dearest, you need not be alarmed. It is nothing serious; I am overtired, that is all. Instow, I know, will give me his arm.’

I made a sign to his wife not to oppose him, and then gave him my support as he desired. In this fashion we proceeded to his bedroom, where I assisted him to undress and put him to bed. By the time this was done his wits had left him again, and he was babbling on all sorts of subjects: Venice, his

kingdom, his army, the treachery of Roche, and many others which I cannot now remember. It was pitiful to hear him, and more than once I felt a lump rising in my throat as I listened.

As soon as he was comfortably settled I called Olivia to him, and then sent a servant off in search of the palace doctor, who lost no time in putting in an appearance. He was a nice young fellow, extremely clever, and, better than all, an Englishman, whom the king had picked up in Hong-kong.

'I trust there is nothing the matter,' he said as I shook hands with him.

'The king has been taken ill,' I answered. 'I fancy the ride from the front and the fall he had outside the city have brought him to a high state of fever. He was delirious, and I have just got him to bed.'

'I had better see him at once, then,' the doctor replied. 'His Majesty has not been in a good state of health for some time past, and a trouble like this may do him an infinity of harm. Is any one with him?'

'Only his wife,' I said. 'If you will come with me, I will take you to them.'

So saying, I led him from the room and down the corridor to the royal apartments. Having left him there, I returned to Olivia's boudoir to await his verdict with what patience I could command. It is at

such moments as these that one lives a lifetime; it is in such moments that one understands what it is to be brought face to face with the probability of a loss that at first seems almost eternal. In that dread uncertainty under which I was then laboring I forgot my own fatigue, my own interest in all other passing events, in fact everything save the man I loved who lay at death's door. The clock upon the wall ticked remorselessly on, the sentry on the steps outside passed and repassed with the monotonous regularity of an automaton, and all the time I stood by the window trying to understand what would happen to us and to the kingdom if the king were taken from it.

How long I remained in this state I cannot say. I only know that it seemed hours before I detected the doctor's step in the corridor outside. When he entered the room I scanned his face for the verdict. What I saw there frightened me beyond all telling.

'What have you to report?' I asked in a voice such as one would be likely to use in addressing a person returned from the dead. 'What is the king's condition?'

'Serious, very serious,' replied the doctor, as he shut the door behind him and approached me. 'His Majesty is in a high state of fever, and is still de-



lirious. I need not disguise the fact from you that I am very anxious about him.'

'But is there any immediate danger, think you?' I asked. 'Tell me candidly, for you must be aware so much depends upon your answer.'

'There certainly is danger,' he answered. 'I will not deny that. But whether it is immediate or not I cannot tell you. A few hours will satisfy us upon that point.'

'In the meantime what are you going to do?'

'I shall go back to His Majesty and remain with him. His is a case in which nothing but the most devoted nursing will avail. He must not be left alone for a single instant, and when he recovers consciousness all public business or news of an exciting nature must be religiously kept from him; otherwise I will not be responsible for the consequences.'

'I quite understand,' I answered. 'Between us we ought to be able to see that none reaches him. Have you told the queen how critical his condition is?'

'No,' he replied; 'that is why I left him to see you. Under the circumstances I think it better that she should not know the real facts of the case. It would be cruel to alarm her before there is any real necessity. We shall be better able to judge to-morrow whether she must learn the truth.'

'I quite agree with you,' I said. 'I am glad to

think she is not to be frightened to-night. If I can be of any assistance, you know you may command my services.'

'I am quite aware of that,' he answered. 'But if your lordship will be guided by me I should advise you to retire to rest yourself. You are thoroughly worn out I can see, and for every one's sake it is advisable that you should not run any further risk.'

I promised to comply with his advice, and then he left me and returned to the sickroom. After the door had closed upon him I opened the window and stepped out on the balcony. It was nearly three o'clock by this time and a cool morning. Already the stars in the eastern heavens were losing their radiance. In another hour they would have disappeared altogether and a new day would be born to us. What strange things had happened since last the king and I had seen the sun rise together—a battle had been fought in which the royal army had been successful, we had received the news of Roche's treachery, and we had ridden for dear life to save the citadel and those we loved. Important, however, as all these things were, they seemed to sink into utter insignificance when compared with the danger in which the king's life now stood.

I was turning to re-enter the room, intending to seek my own apartment and go to bed, when some-

one opened the window and passed into the veranda. It was Olivia. On seeing her I hastened towards her and placing my arm round her waist, kissed her and inquired how she had left her husband.

'He seems a little quieter just now, thank God,' she said. 'The doctor is with him and has sent me away to rest. Oh, Instow, you don't think Marie will die, do you? For Heaven's sake, tell me you don't think that!'

The agony contained in her voice almost unmanned me, but I was quick to remember the doctor's warning and to decide upon the course I should pursue.

'My dearest Olivia,' I answered, 'what on earth has put such a thought into your head? Not the doctor, I'll be bound. Why, my darling, your husband's case is as simple as ABC. As you know, he has not been strong for some time past. The doctors in Europe warned him not to overtax his strength. Well, what has he done? Ridden one hundred and sixty miles in twenty-four hours, fought an important battle in which his horse was shot under him, saved his capital, and defeated a traitor. Is that following the doctor's advice? Of course it isn't. And what is the result? Why, that he is knocked up. No constitution could stand such a strain, much less his. However, he has a clever doctor, he will receive the best possible nursing, and what is better still, he will

be compelled to take the rest he has so long required and has earned so well. Whatever you do, you must not let him think you are anxious. Try to believe that in a week or so he will probably be himself again.'

'You cheer me beyond all telling,' she answered. 'The uncertainty of the last hour has been too terrible. I could not have borne another like it. But you have seen the doctor, and I know you would not deceive me, would you?'

Base as it may seem to say so, I felt there was no course open to me but to scorn the insinuation. I did so, and then had the satisfaction of seeing her eyes brighten and a happier look come into her face. Having escorted her to the door of the bedroom, which for the convenience of her nursing she had caused to be prepared next that occupied by the king, I kissed her and bade her good-night, and then set off for my own apartment. Tired as I was, however, I was not to be permitted to seek my couch in peace. I had scarcely touched the handle of the door before I saw some one coming towards me along the corridor. It was General Prennan, the new Governor of the citadel, and from the way in which he beckoned to me I gathered that he had something he desired to say.

'You must pardon my importunity at this time of

night and when you are so tired, my lord,' he said. 'But I have some serious news to communicate to you. The Frenchman, General Roche's accomplice, has been found, and is now imprisoned in one of the cells at the rear of the barracks. Under the influence of his fear he has made a statement that in my opinion, and I fancy you will agree with me, is of the utmost importance and calls for immediate action. As soon as I heard it, I left him and came straight to you, feeling that, as you are His Majesty's chief adviser and relative, it was only right that you should be informed.'

'If you will come into my sitting-room,' I said, 'I will place myself at your disposal. You can then tell me everything. I need not inform you that after all I have passed through in the preceding twenty-four hours I am quite worn out. However, the king's business must take precedence of everything, even personal comfort, so please come in.'

He followed me into the room, and when I had turned up the lamp, which stood upon the centre table, he took a chair. I seated myself opposite him and begged him to commence, which he did without further preamble.

'The case is as follows, my lord. This evening, after General Roche's death, and when His Majesty had entered the palace with you, my first work was

to pack the troops back to their barracks, then to see that the traitor's body was conveyed to the mortuary to await burial. After that had been done I doubled the sentries on the walls in case the French should come up as Roche had arranged, and then set off to find the man who had been my wretched predecessor's accomplice. Taking a sergeant and half-a-dozen men with me, I searched every part of the citadel in which he could possibly have found a hiding-place, but without success. At last, however, a man came to report having seen the individual in question crouching behind the great water-tanks between the barracks and the arsenal. Thither we repaired and captured our man. He did not attempt to resist, but whined continually for mercy, imagining, I can only suppose, that he would be soon put to death. I did not undeceive him, but had him conveyed to the guardroom, where I questioned him regarding the plot in which he had assisted. However good a conspirator he may have been, he proved a despicable coward when driven into a corner. At first his answers were evasive, and he devoted himself to denying all connection with the conspiracy in question. Seeing this, I resolved to play a game of bluff, and, summoning the sergeant, ordered him to take a couple of files and lead the man to a secluded place behind the arsenal and shoot him at

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once. This brought the fellow to his senses. He grovelled upon the floor, implored mercy, and finally confessed outright. From what he said I gathered that Roche and himself were alone concerned in the plot. None of the other officers of the garrison nor the palace officials played any part in it whatever. I questioned him as to Roche's intentions in the event of success crowning their efforts, and learnt the following. It appears that the garrison was to march out and be annihilated in the jungle about twenty miles from the city. The French were then to walk in without resistance. Roche was to receive a reward of ten thousand pounds and an important position in the Tonquin forces, while he, my informant, it was arranged, should receive five thousand francs as his share of the infamous transaction.'

'But in the event of their not being successful, what was to happen then?' I asked.

'That is exactly what I am coming to,' he answered. 'At first the fellow seemed reluctant to tell me, but upon my rising from my seat and bidding the sergeant lead him off to execution he soon found his tongue; and this is what came out. In the event of the messenger not returning to the camp with the order for the troops to advance, twenty-four hours were to elapse. Then if all were satis-

factory at the citadel and the necessary arrangements had been made, exactly at ten o'clock on the night following, Roche was to display two lanterns on the western wall for five minutes, to be followed by a single lantern, which would be swung to and fro for three. A horseman who had been watching from a spot in the jungle would then set off and convey the intelligence to the commanders of the troops, who would at once advance, Roche agreeing to let them in by the main gate before daylight.'

'The scoundrel—the double-dyed, treacherous scoundrel,' I cried, striking my fist upon the table. 'But surely, Prennan, there may be some way in which we can turn this to account.'

'That is exactly why I worried you with my news to-night,' replied Prennan. 'Had it been less important I should have kept it to myself until to-morrow.'

'I am glad you did not. But there is one thing we must find out first,' I said, 'and that is where the force that is to attack the citadel is encamped. Do you know?'

'In the jungle about thirty miles to the westward of the city, I believe,' he answered. 'But I do not know the exact locality—however, we should have no difficulty in obtaining it from the prisoner. If you wish it I will go and question him at once.'



‘That would be the better plan, I think,’ I answered. Then as an idea struck me I continued: ‘On second thoughts I think I will accompany you. Where shall we find the prisoner?’

‘In the cells behind the barracks, my lord,’ he replied. ‘I have placed a sentry over him that there may be no possible chance of his escaping.’

‘Very good. Then if you will lead the way, I will follow you.’

‘But you are worn out—and’——

‘And the business upon which we are embarking is more important than any feeling of fatigue, I believe you were going to say. Come, come, general,’ I interrupted, ‘let us get on. The sooner we have questioned him and I have ascertained what I want to know the sooner I shall be able to get to my bed.’

With that we let ourselves out by a side-door, and proceeded across the great courtyard, now chill with the newness of the morning, and past the barracks to the cells where the man in question was confined. A sentry with loaded rifle was pacing up and down the stones before the door, but when he saw us enter the yard, he halted and came to the present. The general had taken the precaution to keep the key himself; with it he now opened the door, and we entered.

It was evident the prisoner had not attempted to

sleep, but was still seated on his bed-place just as his guard had left him, waiting with a scared face for his sentence to be pronounced upon him. The lantern which was placed outside the window did not give a very good light, so I brought it in and hung it upon a nail above the bed. Having done this I turned to examine the man before me. He was a tall fellow with a not unhandsome face; wore a large beard and moustache, was well set up, and evidently of decent birth. There was, however, something about his face that seemed strangely familiar to me, though I could not tell where I had met it before. Suddenly it dawned upon me, and a second later I turned to Prennan and said in German:

“Will you oblige me by sending for a barber? I want to have this fellow shaved.”

He looked surprised, but imagining I had some very good reason for my singular request, did as I asked without comment. When the man arrived, the operation was performed, not, however, without a show of reluctance upon the prisoner's part. While the work was proceeding, I took the general outside, and after it was finished led him into the cell again.

‘Now,’ I said, ‘oblige me by looking at the man, and tell me where you have seen him before. I

think it is just possible you may see a likeness to some one you have met.'

Prennan looked and then turned sharply round to me.

'He is the native who attempted the king's life on his wedding day, and who swore he did not know a word of French. I should recognise him anywhere.'

At this the prisoner, imagining that his doom was decreed, fell upon his knees and whined pitifully for mercy.

'Get up,' said the general, with an expression of disgust upon his face such as I cannot hope to describe to you. 'If you want to save your miserable life, you had better collect your wits and prepare to answer truthfully the questions his lordship is going to put to you. Otherwise you die in an hour.'

'I will answer,' whined the man, licking his dry lips and almost grovelling in his eagerness to betray his friends. 'I swear to you I will answer truthfully any questions you may put to me.'

'Then tell us where the French force is located that was to march in here to-night,' I said.

'They are encamped on a plain in the jungle twenty-nine miles to the westward of the city.'

'Whereabouts is this plain?'

'It is three miles beyond the lake in the hills, called by the natives the lake of A-Thou.'

I turned to Prennan, who knew the country as well as any man in it.

‘Do you know the place?’ I asked.

‘I know the lake of A-Thou well enough,’ he answered, ‘but I do not know the plain he speaks of. To the best of my knowledge it is all dense jungle thereabouts, into which very few natives have penetrated.’

I turned to the prisoner again.

‘If you are deceiving me, it will be the worse for you. Supposing I gave you the chance, could you lead us to this plain you speak of?’

‘With my eyes shut,’ he answered confidently. ‘If you will but spare my life, I will take you there in almost half the time that you would reach it by any other road. I know a way through a certain pass in the hills that cuts off half the distance.’

‘Do the French know of this short cut?’

‘Perfectly well. I showed it to their commander myself only a week ago.’

‘And how long will it take us to reach this pass proceeding on foot?’

‘Not more than four hours. I did the distance myself on foot in that time.’

‘Could you take us there under cover of night?’

‘Day or night will be the same to me.’

I looked at Prennan and he looked at me. I then

informed the prisoner that we would give him a decision in an hour, and, signing to the general to follow me, left the cell, taking the precaution to remove the lantern, and to lock the door carefully after us when we went out. I could scarcely contain my eagerness, and once back in my own room I spoke.

‘If what this man has told us proves to be true,’ I said, reaching down a map from the wall, ‘we may be able to turn Roche’s treachery to good account after all. The enemy, as you are aware, have distributed their forces as follows: One portion is here, within the frontier, and was yesterday defeated by General Du Berg. A second is now encamped in the jungle, which I will mark here. That is the force which is to seize the capital, and having garrisoned it is to turn south and fall upon the king’s army in the rear. The third, which is also the weakest, is hastening up from the eastward in this direction in order to afford support to that engaged by Du Berg. Now the plan I have in my mind is as follows: You must remember that no word has been carried to the foe that their plot has failed. Therefore we must allow no one out of the citadel to-morrow with one exception to be mentioned directly. As soon as dusk has fallen, to-morrow, or rather this evening, since it is now morning, every man that can be spared must march out to the

pass mentioned by the prisoner we have just left, under his guidance. Once there they will prepare to take the enemy by surprise as they are marching through the ravine. At ten o'clock the signal with the lanterns will be given from the battlements as arranged, the messenger will depart satisfied, and the force will then start for the city. The rest should be easy. Now to go back a little. A despatch informing Du Berg of all that has occurred must be written at once and forwarded by a messenger we can trust. If the foe are inclined to show fight, he must either attack them and drive them back as far as possible, or leave half his force to hold them in check while he proceeds across country to meet us on the plain upon the other side, and cut off the stragglers as they emerge. By the end of the week we should have the reserves and native allies in readiness to co-operate with him and drive the third detachment towards him; the rest should be only a matter of time. What do you think of my scheme?"

'It strikes me as admirable. If it can only be worked out—which should not be difficult.'

'In that case I will draft the despatches while you find a messenger whom you can trust. He must be a reliable man in every way, and on no account must he let what I shall write fall into the enemy's hands.'

'I know the very man for the work. I will call him up at once.'

'Please do so. If you will have him ready to start in an hour, I shall have prepared my letter by that time.'

He left the room, and I settled myself down at my table to write. It was broad daylight by the time I had finished, and I was so weary I could scarcely open my eyes or move my limbs. Then the messenger had to be examined, instructed and despatched, after which I went softly along the corridor and knocked at the king's bedroom door. The doctor answered it, and on seeing who it was, came into the passage to speak to me.

'How is your patient?' I asked anxiously.

'In a very critical condition, my lord,' he answered. 'I fear the case is even more serious than we imagine. But I shall be able to tell you something more definite by mid-day, I hope.'

I thanked him, and, with an aching heart, went back to my own room. It looked as if I should require all my strength for the work that would have to be accomplished before I should get to bed again. In less than five minutes I was on my bed enjoying such sleep as I had never known in my life before.

## CHAPTER XII.

## A FATEFUL NIGHT.

The sun was high overhead when I woke from my heavy sleep next morning, and I believe, had circumstances permitted it, I could have rolled over on to the other side and have continued my slumber for another five hours without waking. Whether it was on account of my two long rides, or whether it was my fall upon the battlefield that had done it, I could not say; one thing, however, was quite certain, I ached in every limb as if I had been beaten with bludgeons from head to foot. When I crawled from my bed, I was as pitiable a wreck as a man could well wish to see. With the exercise of considerable patience, however, I managed to dress myself, and then went off to find the doctor in order to discover what report he was able to give me of the king's condition. I caught him in the act of leaving the bedroom after his mid-day examination of his patient. He held up his finger to warn me not to speak, and then led me down the corridor as far as the fountain courtyard.



Here he stopped, and we sat down together on the seat by the water.

'I took the liberty of looking in upon you about eight o'clock this morning, my lord,' he said, 'but you were sleeping so soundly that I thought it would be a shame to wake you. I knew you would like to be told at once there is a slight change for the better in his Majesty's condition. He is sensible once more, and his temperature has dropped considerably since I saw you early this morning.'

'Thank God for His mercy,' I said from the very bottom of my heart. 'Your news makes me feel like a different man. Heaven grant the improvement may continue. You think more hopefully of the case now than you did when I last saw you?'

'I trust we may soon have reason to think more hopefully of it,' he answered cautiously. 'But so far the improvement is so very, very slight that I should not be justified in being too sanguine. He is up now, he may be down again in half-an-hour, so that you must not build too much on what I tell you. There is one thing, however, of which I will assure you, if it will afford you any satisfaction, and that is that if doctoring and nursing can do it, he will be saved. I can say no more.'

'That is quite enough,' I answered, taking his hand and gripping it in mine. 'You have given us good

**P**roof of your devotion, and you know, I think, that we have the greatest possible confidence in you. By the way, who is with his Majesty now?

**H**is wife. She has just relieved me.

**H**ave you comforted her with your good news?

**I** have told her just what I have told you,' he answered. **I** think it has done her good. She wanted a fillip badly, and I was very thankful to be able to give her one. This morning early she broke down completely, and if it had not been for the Princess, I don't know what I should have done with her.'

**G**od protect her in her hour of trouble,' I said, and as I did so he rose. We shook hands, and then he went his way, while I went mine out of the palace and across the courtyard to the barracks in search of Prennan.

**I** found him in his own quarters putting the finishing touches to his arrangements for the coming expedition. He rose when I entered and shook me warmly by the hand, at the same time complimenting me upon my improved appearance. In reply, I questioned him as to his preparations for the surprise we were going to spring upon the enemy that night.

**E**verything is in readiness,' he answered. **Du Berg** will receive his despatches, all being well, in an hour's time, and will be certain to march to the rendezvous forthwith. There remains, therefore, only one matter to be settled.'

‘And what is that?’ I inquired. ‘We must leave nothing undecided, for when all is said and done we are playing our game against overwhelming odds.’

‘It is the question as to who shall lead the expedition to-night,’ he answered. ‘I should like to do so myself above all things, but his Majesty has entrusted the command of the citadel to me, and if by any chance what we hope to do to-night were to fall through, and the enemy were to seize the castle during my absence, I should be found to have failed in my trust, and should be disgraced for ever.’

‘Why should I not take command?’ I said. ‘It is true I am not much of a soldier, but in this case I think I could do all that would be required of me. At any rate I could try. And I think my devotion to the king is beyond question.’

‘That is exactly what I was hoping you would say,’ he answered. ‘If your lordship would take command I should let the men go with an easy conscience. I shall send Denton with you as your second. He is a steady, reliable officer, and I am quite sure will assist you to the very best of his power.’

‘He will prove of great assistance to me I have no doubt,’ I said; ‘and now tell me, at what time had we better start, and how many men am I to take with me?’

‘You will have to leave here not a minute later than seven o’clock, or, in other words, just as dusk is falling. I find I cannot spare you more than five hundred men, but under the circumstances, they should prove sufficient for the purpose.’

‘Very good. You may rely upon our doing the best we can to give a good account of ourselves.’

When I returned to the palace I found that it was time for tiffin, and having prepared myself for it, I made my way to the ante-room where it was our custom to wait until the meal was announced. I found it empty, but I had not been there very many minutes before the Princess Natalie entered. I moved from where I was sitting by the window to offer her a seat, and my steps must have revealed my identity to her, for she said at once, with an air of entreaty that was inexpressibly touching:

‘Lord Instow, I have been looking forward to this opportunity, for I want you to tell me the real truth about my brother, without hiding anything from me. I have asked the doctor, but he only tells me that he is doing as well as can be hoped, and expects me to be contented with that. You will see that such an answer gives me no real idea as to his condition, and as you know I love him so dearly, and I am so frightened about him.’

I took her hand, and led her to a seat near the

window. Never had I seen her looking more beautiful, and certainly never more sad. In the present crisis her infirmity seemed more than usually cruel. She was filled with such a desire to help, she boasted such tenderness and devotion, and yet by reason of her blindness she was powerless to do anything.

'Natalie,' I said, 'I will tell you the truth as you desire. Marie is ill, very ill, there can be no doubt about that. But he is better to-day, and the doctor is, I fancy, a degree more confident. You are aware how delicate he has been these three years past. Well, the plain truth is, he has overtaxed his powers lately, and this illness is the result. What a terrible time this is for you I know, but you must endeavor to cheer Olivia, and she must try to cheer you. You will be brave, will you not, for all our sakes?'

She tried instantly to assume a brighter demeanor, and the effort almost brought the tears into my eyes, so brave and yet so ineffectual was it.

'They tell me you are working yourself nearly to death to save my brother's kingdom,' she said, after a moment's pause, laying her hand upon mine as it rested on the arm of her chair. 'What a good day it was for us when Marie first met you.'

The touch of her soft hand on mine, and the music of her voice in my ear sent a thrill through me that coursed in my fifty-four veins like quicksilver, and

presently settled in my heart, making me long, with a greater desire than I had ever yet felt, to tell this sweet, fragile flower, what I had known for upwards of a year in my own mind, yet had never dared to put into words, and that was how fondly and truly I loved her.

‘I wonder if you will always think the same,’ I said, more for the sake of gaining time for thought than for any other reason.

‘Why should I not?’ she asked, turning her face with its poor blind eyes up to mine. ‘You are goodness and kindness itself, and I shall always honor you and be grateful to you. And so will poor Marie if he is spared to us. Oh, Lord Instow, think what it means to me. Ask yourself if anything should befall him what my fate will be. I shall be left alone—quite alone in the world.’

This was too much for me; so without a second thought I placed my arm round her, and drew her towards me.

‘Natalie, my love, my queen,’ I cried, ‘you must not say those cruel words. As long as I live you will never be alone in the world—for I have loved you ever since I first saw you, and I ask nothing better for the future than the right to protect and care for you. Natalie, say you love me in return and will be my wife.’

She nestled in my arms, her beautiful head lying upon my shoulder. I could feel that she was trembling like a leaf. But she was strangely silent. This frightened me, and I bade her turn her face to me.

'You do not love me,' I cried. 'I was wrong to speak to you in that fashion.'

This brought her speech back to her as quickly as I could wish.

'You were not wrong,' she answered. 'I love you with my whole heart and soul. It seems to me I have loved you always.'

I kissed her upon her pure, sweet lips, and called her by the sacred name of wife. Oh Heaven, what happiness was mine. I had nursed my passion so long in secret that it seemed to burst forth into greater flame by reason of such penning up. How the remaining interval passed before tiffin was announced, I have only a confused recollection. I remember telling her of the expedition I was to lead against the enemy that evening, and assuring her that she need have no fears for my safety. I remember Olivia entering and being told the news; and the loving way in which she kissed us both and wished us every happiness, although her own heart was strained nearly to breaking pitch by her anxiety, comes back to me now at times like a touch of pain.

I am ashamed to say in spite of the sorrow under

which we were laboring on account of the king's health, in spite of the grave position of the kingdom, I spent the remainder of that afternoon in an earthly Paradise. It was Natalie who listened to my plans for bringing about the salvation of the Medangs; it was Natalie who gave me the locket she wore round her own soft neck, as a talisman that was to bring me back in safety to her. The sun sinking below the hills, and the long shadows of night drawing across the plain, found us together on the battlements, and it was not until an hour before it was time for us to start that I went to make my final arrangements with the Governor.

Almost punctually at seven o'clock, an officer entered the palace to inform me that the troops had fallen in. I accordingly bade my sweetheart and my sister farewell, and with a curious mist before my eyes, and a feeling in my heart that had never been there before, took my place at the head of the force under my command.

'Good-bye, my lord,' said Prennan, shaking me warmly by the hand. 'The prisoner who is to act as your guide is handcuffed between two men as you see, nevertheless I should still advise you to keep your eye upon him. You have the pick of my garrison, and I wish you every possible good fortune.'

I reciprocated his wish, and then the gates having



been opened, gave the word of command, and in the gathering gloom we marched out and down the hill.

Of the march that followed there is little to tell. On leaving the city, our way lay through the jungle by means of well defined paths for about ten miles. Then the road became somewhat intricate, and finally, it struck me as being a mere matter of guess-work on our guide's part. He, however, seemed quite confident, and as his life depended on the result, I was willing to trust him.

It was a strange experience, and one not to be easily forgotten, that march through the jungle. After we had left the paths proper, it was in some cases as much as we could do to force a passage through the masses of creeper, the interlacing bamboos, and the thick grasses that barred our way. The sounds of the forest were also curious in the extreme. As we pressed forward, it was to the chattering accompaniment of half-awakened monkeys; while with every stroke of the parang, startled birds flew from their shelter in the bushes, and went whirring across our path. Now and again a deer would spring up from almost under our feet, and be gone before one had hardly time to realise he was there, while more than once we heard a tiger prowling at no great distance from the line of march.

When we had been pushing our way steadily on

for what seemed an eternity, I gave the command to halt, and with the assistance of a match examined my watch. It was exactly a quarter past ten, so thinking we should be somewhere near our destination, I called the guide up and interrogated him.

He replied to the effect that in less than a quarter of an hour he would bring us to the pass, and warning him again as to what his fate would be if he deceived me, I ordered the march to proceed.

His words proved true, for well within the time stated, we found ourselves approaching a range of hills that towered up into the moonlit sky. The ground had been slowly ascending for some time prior to this, and there could be no doubt that we were now close to our destination. A few moments later we left the jungle, and, climbing a small stretch of open land, found ourselves at the entrance to a long pass, or as it might be more correctly termed, gully, in the hills. From the bottom, which was scarcely a hundred feet wide, the walls rose almost sheer on one side to a height of perhaps two hundred feet, on the other to a height of fifty, then in the latter case there was a peculiar description of plateau from which the hill rose again, this time on a gentler slope, for another eighty or ninety feet.

Halting my men at the mouth, and taking Denton with me, I hastened along the pass, noting its pe-

culiarities and adaptabilities for my purpose as I went. In something like twenty minutes I had reached the other end, had learnt what I wanted to know, and was ready to turn back.

Having rejoined my command, I divided it into three parts. One—the strongest, I placed under Denton at the head of the pass to command the exit. The second, which I proposed to take charge of myself, I established on the plateau half way through the gully—the third I stationed almost at the further end that it might cut off the retreat.

As soon as they were placed in their several positions, and I had satisfied myself that they were not discernible from the bottom of the pass, I gave my final instructions to the officers in command of each party. These were to the effect that not a shot was to be fired until they saw the rocket—which I had brought with me for that express purpose—go up. On the discharge of the second they were to cease. Then I placed the signal just referred to in position, and afterwards lay down, with the prisoner beside me in charge of his keepers, to await the course of events. I had no intention that he should have an opportunity afforded him of giving his friends the alarm.

For nearly two hours we lay concealed, all the time awaiting the foe's appearance with an anxiety

no one who has not taken part in such an affair could realise. The moon dropped lower upon the hill, the night wind sighed like a lost spirit among the rocks and long grass, a night bird hooted from a tree, and once or twice jackals cried to each other from across the pass. It was dreary work, rendered perhaps more so to my mind by the semi-treacherous nature of the business we had come to accomplish. Had it been possible I would rather have given the foe battle in the open, man to man, but one moment's reflection showed me the madness of such a course. On the other hand I remembered the fact that the force in question was marching against us with an equal purpose in view, and when all was said and done we were only taking care of ourselves. 'Twas fine argument for both sides at the best, and one had to take it at one's own valuation.

Almost as my repeater struck eleven-thirty there burst upon my ear the sound of voices, and next moment, with a suddenness that startled me, the advance guard of the enemy appeared in sight. Scarcely more than fifty yards behind them came the main body, chatting and laughing without any thought of a surprise. I waited until they were exactly opposite me, and then, crouching behind a rock, in order that the tiny flame might give them no warning of our position, I lit a match and set fire to the rocket. With

a long hiss and a trail of sparks it rose into the air, and at the same instant two hundred and fifty rifles crashed out, followed an instant later by a similar number.

Anything like the horror and the ghastly confusion of the next few minutes no man could possibly imagine. The terrified troops in the gully below knew not what to do or which way to turn. Their ranks were completely disorganised, while volley after volley was being poured into them from the hillside above. They tried to advance, but were met by Denton's fire; they tried to retreat, and were assailed by the third party; while mine continued to rake them from between. The air was filled with cries and curses, the rattle of rifles, and the shouting of orders. Dante's *Inferno* was not to be compared with it. When I imagined the time had come, I discharged the second rocket and the firing instantly ceased.

As soon as I thought I could make myself heard, I shouted in a loud voice, in French:

'Lay down your arms, and your lives will be spared. Fail to do so, and I open fire once more.'

When sufficient time had been given for this command to be executed, I ordered what remained of the force to march down the valley in the direction they had come. This was done by all able to move, and so nicely had our arrangements fitted in, that

almost exactly as they reached the mouth of the defile Du Berg's force entered the plain on the other side.

Half an hour later we were shaking hands upon our success. With the loss of but three men killed and five wounded we had cut up a force of nearly a thousand, killing three hundred, wounding upwards of three hundred more, and capturing the balance with all their arms and ammunition.

It was then arranged that I should take charge of the prisoners and wounded, and convey them back to the capital, so when my force had rested, I set off on my journey. It proved a harder task than I had bargained for, but I was so elated by my success that I would have undertaken it had it been twice as difficult.

It was well on towards evening when we reached the capital. The news had preceded us, and enthusiastic to the last degree was the welcome we received. Crowds lined the streets through which we passed, and when we entered the citadel itself the climax was reached. Prennan received me in the courtyard with the garrison under arms, and as soon as I had seen my convoy safely inside the gates, I greeted him. I could feel the grip he gave my hand for hours after. But there was another welcome I was waiting for, and when I entered the palace that welcome

I received. Frighfened, however, by what Natalie told me of the king's condition I soon went in search of the doctor. I found him awaiting me in my own sitting-room.

'What news have you to tell me?' I asked as I shook him by the hand. 'How 'is the king?'

'Worse,' he answered dolefully. 'Much worse. He has been delirious since you left, and now shivering fits, or rigors as we call them, have set in. Knowing his constitution as I do, I cannot understand what they mean.'

I groaned aloud.

'Tell me candidly your opinion,' I said, resolved to come at his meaning. 'Do you anticipate the worst?'

The young doctor nearly broke down as he answered:

'God help us, I fear I do.'

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE END.

Sometimes when I lie awake now and look back on those dreadful days of suspense, and think of all we suffered then on the king's account, I am tempted to believe that it must have been a nightmare, and that it never could have really happened. But at the time our misery was a terrible reality, and quite beyond expression in words. For three days, after my return from the defeat of the enemy in the jungle, we waited hour by hour for the dread news that was to shatter all our hopes, and to bow us to the earth in the keenest sorrow of our lives. Even the good news that reached us from the front telling us of Du Berg's success against the foe's third army corps scarcely moved us beyond a mere expression of congratulation, so wrapped up were we in our own more direful concerns. And yet I am wrong in calling it our own, for our sorrow was not confined to the palace alone, but was shared by the whole country at large. Day and night the great gates were besieged by inquirers who did not content themselves with one visit, but returned again and again to ask for later news. If any proof had been wanting of the love entertained for the king by his people this would surely have furnished it. Men and women of all ranks



and ages, nay, even little children, thronged the portal continually, and went sorrowfully away on being informed that the sentries had still no satisfactory news to impart. Some of the scenes were pathetic in the extreme, and once I felt compelled to turn my face away in order to hide my emotion, when a tiny babe, who could scarcely have seen five summers clad only in a shirt which barely sufficed to cover half his brown little body, made his way up the hillside and appeared before me, bearing in his hand the root of a plant which he had heard his mother state would infallibly restore the king to health. I took it from him, giving him in return a piece of money, and then went in and handed it to Olivia, who wept over it openly.

At sundown that evening the king was conscious and asked for me. The doctor having given his permission, Olivia came in search of me, and found me sitting with Natalie upon the battlements. I rose immediately his Majesty's request was made known to me, and accompanied her downstairs to the sick room.

Nerved as I was to see a change in the man before me, I was quite unprepared for the terrible picture he presented as I entered the room. His always thin face was now that of a skeleton covered with a dead white skin, from which his dark eyes stared like lumps of coal. He seemed, moreover, to have shrunk

to half his former size, and this in less than a week.

As soon as he saw me he made a sign to his wife to leave us alone together, which she did as soon as she had given me the strictest injunctions on no account to let the invalid tire himself by too much talking.

After she had shut the door behind her, I approached the bed and took the king's hand.

'Instow,' he said, but so feebly that I had to put my ear close to his face in order that I might catch his words, 'I want to talk to you while I have time. I am very ill, and God alone knows if I shall ever be better. In case I should not'—

He paused for breath, and it was nearly half a minute before he could continue.

'In case I should not, I want you to promise me that you will take care of Natalie,' he said. 'I know you will look after Olivia and the boy, so I need not ask that.'

'You need have no fear,' I answered, with such a lump in my throat that I could scarcely speak. 'I will guard them all as long as I have life. I ought to tell you that I have asked Natalie to be my wife, and she has consented.'

He closed his eyes and I heard him mutter, 'Thank God!' Then opening them again, he looked at me and squeezed my hand so feebly that it was like the touch of a little child.

'It is what I have always hoped and wished would happen,' he said. 'Now, if God wills it, I can die happy.'

'But you are not going to die,' I said, roused out of the quietude I had resolved to display by his words. 'You are going to live and make your country, which loves you so devotedly, the place you dreamed it would some day be.'

He did not answer, save with a look of unutterable longing.

'What news have you for me about the war?' he asked after a little interval.

'The best of news,' I answered. 'Your army is everywhere victorious. Du Berg has defeated the first and third sections, and I completely annihilated the second within thirty miles of the city two nights ago. There are already signs that the enemy are preparing themselves to discuss terms of peace. I prophesy that in less than a month it will be settled.'

'You do me worlds of good,' he replied. 'You used to laugh; but I knew what my people would do when they were put to the test.'

I then informed him that I had no intention of allowing him to talk any more, and a moment later, as if to put a stop to our interview, the doctor entered the room. Approaching the bed he felt his patient's pulse.

'Why, what have you been doing,' he asked.

'You're fifty per cent stronger than you were this morning.'

'I have had good news,' he answered feebly, and then bade me 'good-bye.'

After leaving the sickroom, I went on to Olivia's boudoir expecting to find her there. To my surprise, however, the room was empty, and though I called, imagining she might be in the room adjoining, she did not answer. The window leading into the veranda stood open, and I passed through it into the cool air outside. My whole being seemed numbed with the intensity of my anxiety. I could think of nothing but the condition of the man I had just left, and what would happen if he were taken from us. When something, what it was I shall never understand, induced me to cross the square towards the cathedral on the other side.

With a feeling of awe, almost indescribable after this length of time, I entered the building to find a curious service proceeding. The altar was a blaze of light, and praying before it was the king's chaplain, the brave padre whose pluck had enabled us to act so promptly in saving the citadel. Kneeling on the stone steps behind him again, her head bowed upon her hands, was a woman whom I recognised at once as none other than Olivia.

Without hesitation I went softly up the aisle and took my place beside her. At the time the priest was

praying for the king's life with an earnestness that touched me to the heart. The strange old building was wrapped in deepest shadow save where the lights of the high altar shone so brilliantly, and the low tones of the padre's voice echoed in the darkness with a weird effect.

When he had finished his prayer he turned towards us, upraised his hand, and gave his blessing. We remained as we were for a few moments, then we rose and left the church. Once outside I gave my sister my arm, and led her back to the palace, intending to find Natalie and place her into her charge as soon as possible. She was quite exhausted and almost beside herself with grief.

Having surrendered her to my sweetheart's tender care I went to the sickroom and informed the doctor that it was my intention to go to bed. At the same time I asked him to call me at once should any change take place in his patient's condition. This he promised to do.

When I did get to bed my dreams were not good, and I had much better have been waking. One moment I was galloping after the king across the battle-field—the next I was riding with him for dear life to save the citadel—then I was back in India, and after that, by the rapid transit existing in the land of dreams, fighting the foe tooth and nail in the jungle of the Medanga.

It must have been well on for morning when I was awakened by some one violently shaking me by the shoulder.

Having just been dreaming that the French were attacking us, I sprang up in bed, and seized my assailant by the throat. I soon saw my mistake, however. It was the doctor.

‘My dear fellow,’ I cried as soon as I realised this fact, ‘I must apologise a thousand times for my rudeness. I took you for a Frenchman. I’m really exceedingly sorry.’

‘Don’t mention it, my lord,’ he replied, like the good fellow he was. ‘You have not hurt me in the least.’

‘What has brought you to see me?’

‘I have come to tell you that I have made an exceedingly important discovery,’ he said.

‘A discovery! What on earth is it? Does it concern his Majesty?’

‘It is a matter of life and death to him.’

‘Then what is it? Tell me while I dress.’

I jumped out and commenced my toilet, while he sat, pale and heavy eyed, upon the bed watching me.

‘It is this. I am beginning to believe that after all I was mistaken in my first diagnosis of his Majesty’s case. Two years ago I told him I considered him consumptive. I said I thought his lungs were beginning to be affected, or if they were not, that they very soon would be. I advised him to go to

Europe at once and consult a first-class specialist. He did so with the result that my opinion was confirmed. Since then the disease has lain comparatively dormant, I must confess, much to my surprise. Now, however, the excitement of the last month, the amount of exertion his Majesty has undertaken, and more probably than all, his fall, is forcing what I verily hope and believe has been the cause of all the trouble, out of his system. Have you ever heard his Majesty refer to his having been shot at one time or another?

'Never,' I answered. 'If he was, I cannot remember his having told me about it. You know the extraordinary life he has led. What makes you ask such a question?'

'Because he carries a scar that tells me that at some time or another he has had a bullet in his system. I can find no mark of an exit, therefore, it is logical to conclude that unless it was withdrawn by the same hole as it made on entering, it is still in his body.'

'And in that case the result would be what?'

'Well, that is a rather difficult question to answer offhand. It may mean nothing, it might mean everything. If it struck the chest wall, as I suppose it to have done, it might produce the phthisical symptoms I spoke of just now. If the presence of the bullet did not trouble him, it would probably, if not

certainly, become incised, after which he would, in nine cases out of ten, think no more about it. Years would go by, and phthisical symptoms, or those resembling phthisis, would develop until he believed himself in a decline. Then some violent exertion, culminating, say, in long rides, and a fall from his horse, would be likely to cause the bullet to move, after which matter would form and pain in the side, such as his Majesty has been complaining of during the past forty-eight hours, would occur. Rigors would next set in, thereby proving indisputably the existence of a foreign element, and the case, from being medical, would then become a surgical one.'

I stopped midway in my dressing and stared at him for some moments unable to speak. When I recovered myself I cried:

'For heaven's sake, man, think well before you raise such hopes. Do you mean that if you can remove this bullet there is a possibility of his recovering, and being a strong man once more?'

'Under God's pleasure, I do,' he answered almost with a shout. 'At the same time, however, Lord Instow, I do not withhold from you the knowledge that the operation, though simple enough in itself, is a dangerous one to attempt with one so weak. It may kill him, it may cure him.'

'But suppose you do not operate. What will the result be then?'

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'He will die. In that case there is no hope at all for him. You see the case, I hope. What am I to do?'

'Good heavens, what a position to place me in,' I said. 'What can I answer. If I say operate, and he dies, I shall feel like his murderer; on the other hand, if I withhold my consent, he will die, and I shall feel equally guilty. Do you give it as your professional opinion that the operation should be performed?'

'I do,' he answered. 'That is my irrevocable opinion. I shall always think so.'

'Then let it be so,' I replied. 'As far as I am concerned I consent. But before anything definite is done we must have a meeting of the council. If they agree, the responsibility is off our shoulders. But they must be consulted first. How long a time can elapse before it is done?'

'It must be done in a few hours, if it is to be done at all,' he answered.

'And who will do it?' I asked.

'I shall myself,' he replied, 'assisted by a native surgeon from the town.'

'Very well. In that case I will let you know the council's decision in an hour. In the meantime not a word to the queen. If she were alarmed before it were necessary I should never forgive myself. She is in a very low state as it is.

‘She shall not know, believe me.’

He left me, and as soon as I had dressed I sought out the Governor, and begged him at once to call a meeting of the king’s council. When the members had reached the palace and were assembled in the council hall, I placed the matter before them. The doctor was called in and examined, and when he had reiterated his opinion, consent was given to the work being performed.

How the rest of that miserable day passed I do not know. Prior to the arrival of the doctor and his assistant, I drew Olivia into her boudoir, and told her everything, trying to put it before her in as favorable a light as possible. She heard me out with a face that was white to the very lips. When I had finished, she dropped into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. I knelt on the floor beside her, and did my best to comfort her, but she would not hear me.

‘If he dies,’ she said, staring straight before her with eyes that were wide open and yet seemed to see nothing, ‘it will kill me. I could not live without him now. Oh, Marie, Marie, my darling, my husband.’

I tried to tell her that the operation was not so serious as she imagined, but the half lie died upon my lips unspoken. It was not the operation that was so dangerous—it was the inability of the weak

patient to support it. Throughout that long morning I sat with her, and it was only when the clock had chimed mid-day that I surrendered her to Natalie, and went to my own room. Half-an-hour later the native assistant came to tell me that the operation had been successfully performed, and that the king had recovered from his anaesthetic administered to him.

Upon hearing this, I immediately set off to the queen's apartments and told the ladies the good news. It cheered them wonderfully, and it did me good to see the brightness come back to Olivia's eyes once more. Natalie's hand in mine told me what she felt upon the subject. Half-an-hour later a second bulletin was issued stating that his Majesty was progressing as favorably as could be expected under the circumstances. In this fashion the afternoon went by, bulletins were issued every hour, but it was not until nearly dusk that I saw anything of the doctor.

Then I was sitting in my own room endeavoring to make myself believe that I was reading, when I heard a body lurch nearly against my door. Thinking it might be some one taken ill in the corridor outside, I crossed the room and looked out. There I found the doctor leaning against the wall looking like a ghost.

I led him into the room and helped him to a chair.

No sooner had I got him to it, however, than he sank heavily down, and fainted dead away. After I had brought him round again, which was a matter of some time and difficulty, he drank a tumblerful of almost neat spirit, and then stated that he felt himself again.

‘Fancy my going off like that,’ he said. ‘I’m more like a baby than a man. I deserve to be treated like a child for the future.’

‘I am not going to hear you abuse yourself,’ I answered. ‘You have done the work of two men lately, and now you are suffering for it. But tell me how you left his Majesty, and who is with him?’

‘He is asleep,’ he answered, ‘and his wife is there. I found the bullet, and he will do now, Lord Instow; I pledge my reputation upon it. Recovery will be slow, but it will be sure. When, however, he gets about again he should be a new man.’

‘God save the king,’ I cried with such enthusiasm that it made even the doctor smile.

The case turned out as the doctor predicted. His Majesty’s recovery was very slow, but it was also very sure; and in a month from the date of operation he was so far advanced in health as to be able to leave his bed. By this time there was the best of good news to tell him. The preparations for the Treaty of Peace were in an advanced state, and the date was already agreed upon which the prime min-

ister and a second member of his Majesty's council were to meet the representatives of the French in order to discuss it. It did one good to see the joy it gave the king to be able once more to enter upon matters connected with his kingdom; and if one wanted greater pleasure than that, it was only necessary to watch the love and tenderness with which he was treated by his wife. Her devotion to him was extraordinary; she had gone near to losing him, and now that providence had sent him back to her as it were almost from the brink of the grave, it seemed as if she could not do enough for him. It was a happy group that morning after morning sat with books or work, in the sunshine, upon the palace roof. The blackness of the past was slowly giving way to the brightness of the present, and the fact was discernible on every face.

Since the king's recovery, rewards for past services had been showered in all directions. Polacci had been raised to the dignity of Deputy-Governor of the citadel, A-mat had been appointed special body servant to the king, the padre was made a bishop, upon Du Berg was bestowed the equivalent of an English peerage, while the order of Marie I., Prennan's step in rank, was confirmed, and the Chow-mung received a grant of land to himself and his heirs forever. Even the horses which had carried us so well and bravely on that terrible night were

not forgotten, and were pensioned off for the rest of their equine existences.

‘And now, Instow,’ said the king, when he had finished reading the list, and I had given him my opinion upon it, ‘I am perplexed by one thing. I fancy I have been unjust, and I want you to help me to set it right to the person I have injured. Will you do so?’

‘Your Majesty must first tell me all about it,’ I said, half suspecting what was coming. ‘If it lies in my power, I think you know me well enough to feel sure I will help you.’

‘It is about yourself,’ he answered with a smile. ‘You have been my guardian angel, if I may so put it, ever since I first met you. To you I owe my wife, my life, and even my kingdom and my happiness. You have done more than all the rest of my friends put together, and yet you are the only one who goes unrewarded. What am I to do to set this right?’

There was the sound of a soft footstep on the stones behind me, and I turned to find Olivia and Natalie approaching from the steps. I waited until they had come up with us, and then took the latter’s hand.

‘If you really wish to reward me, your Majesty,’ I said, ‘there is one way in which you can do it, and as far as I can see only one. It is by giving me the hand I am holding now.’

‘With all my heart,’ replied the king. ‘If she is willing, you shall have her, Instow, with ten thousand blessings on your heads.’

He kissed his sister affectionately on both cheeks, and then shook me by the hand. Having done so, he walked to the wall and looked down at the plain below. . . . But not before I had seen that his eyes had filled with tears. That they were not tears of sorrow I felt quite certain.

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Three months have passed since the interview just described, and we are in Japan on the deck of my yacht lying in Nagasaki harbor. The king is beside me on the bulwarks, and Natalie, Olivia, and the baby a little further aft. In a few minutes we shall be saying good-bye to the land of the Chrysanthemum, and our bows will be pointed once more in the direction of the Medangs. Indeed, Wells is already on the bridge, the quartermaster at the wheel beside him, and the cable is just beginning to come aboard. A quantity of sampans and other native boats have been crowded round us all day, but even they are beginning to draw off, and very soon we shall have said farewell to one of the loveliest harbors in the world.

We have been absent from the Medangs ever since peace was signed, nearly three months ago, and now we are starting for home with his Majesty quite his

own self once more. Or rather to be correct, I should say not his own old self, for he looks stronger than any of us have ever seen him before.

Suddenly he turns from his contemplation of the boats alongside, and says very seriously to me:

‘Instow, my brother, do you know what day this is?’

‘The 24th of April, I believe,’ I answer.

‘Of course,’ he replied. ‘But I mean what anniversary it is?’

‘I am afraid I cannot tell you that offhand,’ I say. ‘What is it?’

‘It is two years to-day,’ he observes, ‘since we sailed from Venice to the rescue of my kingdom. How much has happened since then.’

‘Indeed yes,’ I continue. ‘Your Majesty has won your wife, you have a noble heir to follow you, in the meantime, you are seated more firmly upon your throne than ever.’

‘Thanks to you. I shall never forget how much I owe you, Instow.’

Before I have time to answer, Olivia with her child in her arms comes along the deck, and stands beside her husband. Seeing Natalie alone, I go aft to her and lead her to the bulwarks.

I describe to her the scene before me, and when the anchor is aboard, the screw is revolving, and the vessel’s head is pointed for the open sea, I draw her closer to me and ask her if she is happy.



'More than happy, dear,' she replies with a little squeeze of my hand, that like most lover's endearments is more expressive than any words, and needs no answer. The yacht speeds upon her way, and mile after mile drops behind us, and before long the blue hills we had been admiring all day are only a faint smudge upon the horizon.

By the time our dinner is eaten, and we have sought the deck again, it is almost dark. On the eastern sea-line the moon is rising, throwing a bar of light right athwart our track. We make quite a family group as we stand at the taffrail watching it.

'What a lovely night it is,' says Olivia, linking her arm in her husband's, and looking up into his face as if she believed he was responsible even for the beauty of the evening.

'It is a good omen,' says some one, and the sentiment is echoed by the group.

In a mock heroic fashion, I strike the rail before me.

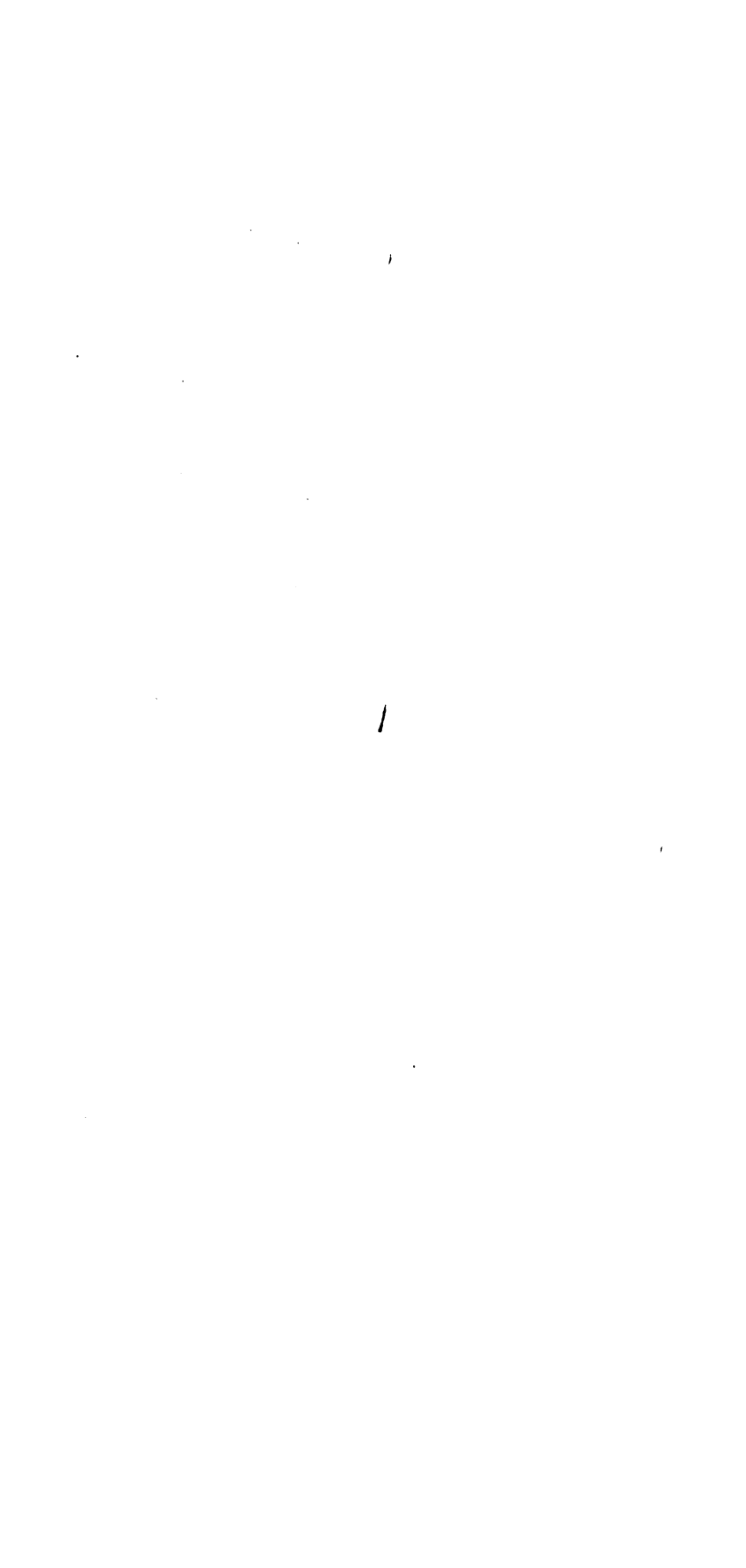
'Haste on, good ship,' I cry, 'haste on, for the greatest happiness of all my life lies at the other end.'

'And pray what may that be?' asks a meek little voice, which nevertheless I recognise as Natalie's.

'My marriage,' I answer promptly, 'and now you know.'

THE END.

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